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Defending Home and Village: The Red Spear Movement in Republican China.

by

Jerremie Vernon Clyde

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

in

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Defending Home and Village: The Red Spear Movement in Republican China.* Submitted by Jerremie Clyde in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Red Spear Society, a sectarian militia active in northern China for much of the first half of the twentieth century. The study begins by focusing on the body of literature on the Red Spears produced to date. Understanding how the study of the secret societies has developed since its beginnings in the 1970s will not only help to place this work in the context of the existing literature, but also show why "military" history has been ignored. The second chapter describes and introduces the Red Spear movement. It will deal with many of the factors which helped bring the group into being, the group's organization, membership, and goals. The chapter will also to explain why the Red Spears were the most significant of the many sectarian militias which operated at the time. The third chapter focuses on the Red Spears in action, particularly in how they were able to defeat bandits and soldiers alike, the actual operation of the Red Spear's system of organization, and their utilization of intelligence. To examine how the Red Spears were able to defeat their opponents while sustaining so few casualties, both their field tactics and the effective disparity in arms between them and their opponents will be observed. This chapter will show how the Red Spears, magic aside, formed an effective and rational defense strategy for the rural population of the North China plain. The fourth and concluding chapter looks at how military defeat, assimilation into the Red Army, and lack of necessity brought the movement to an end.

PREFACE

In 1921-1945, roughly corresponding to the warlord period and the Second Sino-Japanese war, the Red Spear Society (*hongqiang hui*), a sectarian militia and secret society, provided safety and stability to millions of rural Chinese in northern China (Shandong, Henan, Shanxi, Shaanxi, southern Hebei, and northern Anhui and Jiangsu.)[1] Sectarian militias, of which the Red Spears were the largest, had both militia and sectarian aspects. The Red Spears were formed, like many militias, when professional soldiers could no longer be counted on, when the fear of violence was chronic and actual violence and abuse imminent. They were an ad hoc military response on the part of the civilian population to immediate security threats, who also utilized esoteric knowledge and secret practices to make the movement more cohesive than a traditional militia. While traditionally studied as a form of sectarian religion or secret society, they also represented an effective and rational military survival strategy in response to an absent central government, civil war, insecurity and violence. While armed with little more than spears, the members of the Red Spear Society through superior organization and intelligence, and not magic, were able to defeat opponents armed with rifles, machine-guns, and artillery. Their ability to do this while sustaining surprisingly few casualties helps in turn to explain the movement's popularity.

The Red Spear Society taught its members that through magic and training they could become immune to bullets. Traditionally, commentators on the Red Spears have

focused on these claims of invulnerability, offering them as at least a partial explanation for why the movement was so popular. The fact remains, however, that the Red Spears were not bullet proof, and focusing primarily on this aspect of the movement does little to explain its popularity and effectiveness. It was not only the promise of invulnerability, but also a careful analysis of the chances of victory versus the possibility and risk of defeat, which motivated peasants to join. The Chinese peasants while believing in magic were also rational historical agents and would only believe the claims of magic and join the Red Spears if the Red Spears were able to defend their homes, without necessarily costing them their lives. It was not through magic, but through effective organization and an intelligence monopoly, that the Red Spear Society defeated not only armies of bandits but also warlord and Japanese armies. Their sectarian practices when combined with concern for their own homes gave the group the cohesiveness necessary to face modern arms and armies. When combined with their ability to concentrate large numbers of men where and when they were needed, the Red Spear Society was able to provide stability in a time characterized by chaos.

While not normally examined in the context of the Red Spears, the American Military Intelligence Department's (MID) records are invaluable. American military advisors wrote a steady stream of reports dealing with both the battles and combat abilities of China's main military forces. They found sectarian militias and the Red Spears especially fascinating. The Red Spears were of particular interest not only for their claims

of invulnerability, but also for their size, popularity, and ability to destroy modern military forces. When combined with more traditional sources, the MID reports provide valuable insight into how and why the Red Spear Society was able to be effective. This in turn shows that joining the Red Spears was a rational and effective military response to a persistent and pervasive security threat to home and family.

By looking at the MID reports, newspaper accounts, and Chinese sources it is possible to see how several factors came together to make the Red Spear Society an effective military force. One of the primary factors was their ability to mobilize large numbers of men quickly and at the decisive point. This was made all the more effective by their opponent's inability to do the same. These sources also shed light on the vast advantage in intelligence the Red Spears had over the bandits and soldiers they fought. When these two factors are combined it can be seen that the Red Spears were able to enter the battlefield with significant advantages on their side. My examination of the effective disparity in arms and the Red Spear defeats, based primarily on the MID reports, will show how the Red Spears defeated their opponents and did so with a minimal loss of life. It was the Red Spears' ability to overcome their disadvantage in arms and provide security without high casualties that made them a popular and rational survival strategy.

For the purposes of this study, the term "secret society" will be used in the broadest sense, inclusive of the Red Spear Society, the Taipings, the White Lotus society, brotherhood associations, and syncretic sects. More particularly the study will be dealing with "esoteric sectarian militia." This refers to a form of militia with "special knowledge"

that was only intended for members of the group. This "knowledge" was protected by oaths and initiation rites which prohibited sharing the information with people outside of the group. They are sectarian because they have a specific act of initiation and their beliefs and doctrines are different from those of the rest of society.[2] As sectarians they created an alternative community that provided identity and solidarity.[3] The term "militia" refers to any basically non-subversive group raised more or less ad hoc from the civilian population with a primarily defensive character.[4] In Chinese the Red Spear Society is simply known as the *hongqiang hui*; there is no distinction made between the society as a whole and individual Red Spear chapters. In fact during the first half of this century *hongqiang hui* was used generically to refer to any one of the sectarian militias of the time.[5] This distinction is necessary in English, and for the purposes of this study "Red Spear Society" will be used to discuss the movement as a whole, its beliefs, methods, ideologies and so on. The individual semi-independent village Red Spear Societies will be referred to as "Red Spear chapters." When no distinction is necessary or when referring to both levels at the same time the term "Red Spears" will be used.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES

Allied Translation and Interpretation Service.	ATIS
US Military Intelligence Department	MID

Map 1. Areas of Red Spear Activity.
(modified from Bonavia, 1995: 61.)

CHAPTER 1. Introduction: Military History and the Study of Chinese Sects.

The Red Spear Societies, similar to rural bandits and the Chinese Communist Party, constitute an example of peasant activism in Chinese history. While commonly studied as another facet of Chinese secret societies, the Red Spears were primarily military organizations. By dealing with the Red Spears Society as a military topic, instead of using a traditional social approach, we gain a better understanding of their abilities and limitations, how they functioned, and why communities decided to organize their own Red Spear Societies. Studying the battles, tactics, and military organization of the Red Spears, or any secret society for that matter, seems to break with academic tradition. The Red Spear Society, which was formed to provide military solutions to defense problems, has not been examined by military historians. Basic knowledge such as how a group of spear wielding peasants could defeat soldiers armed with modern weapons is unknown. More importantly, why a peasant would want to join such a seemingly suicidal venture has been ignored. The Red Spears involved thousands of rebels and insurgents, but there was no insurgency or rebellion.

While this study has consulted Chinese language sources, it is primarly based on Western scholarship in the field. Over the past twenty years the study of Chinese secret societies has become increasingly popular with Western historians. The study of Chinese secret societies has been, and will likely continue to be, the domain of the social historian

in the West. The field today is in many ways the study of how sectarian groups and rebels fit within society, why they feel the need to rebel, and how the rebellion affected society after it ended. The rebellion itself, that time of intense emotion and violence of the secret societies being fully mobilized, has been basically ignored.

Jean Chesneaux, the first Western historian to deal with Chinese secret societies in a scholarly way, started studying secret societies and their revolutionary potential as an example of class conflict in Chinese society.[1] Today they are studied because they give historians insight into peasant life. The focus of this field has been to try and define secret societies themselves, as well as their role in peasant life, and conversely the role of the peasant in the secret society. Over the past twenty years, not only have these definitions been reworked, they have also become increasingly sophisticated.

Chesneaux, like many other historians of the late 1960's, was determined to study history from the bottom up. For him this meant studying the Chinese peasant instead of the Chinese elite.[2] The central role that secret societies played in peasant lives was so great that it is no surprise that Chesneaux decided to study the Chinese peasantry through secret societies. By focusing on the social aspects of secret societies and their rebellions he was breaking new ground. At the time he was praised for doing "what no other Western social scientist has dared--a social history of the first and foremost genuine peasant revolution in world history."[3] By focusing on the social aspects of secret societies and rebellion, Chesneaux was taking the first step towards defining the study of secret societies as the realm of the social historian.

Chesneaux was primarily concerned with why China produced secret societies and why the secret societies incited and participated in rebellions. He adopted a rigidly Marxist class model with clearly defined classes and believed that the secret societies functioned as a primitive form of organized social protest in response to a class of oppressive elite. In this capacity the secret societies gave voice to the disenfranchised peasants' concerns about religion, politics, and society. Chesneaux saw the secret societies as a purer or more concentrated form of peasant society. At the same time, the secret societies also represented a form of proto-nationalism, embodying the peasants' dissatisfaction with alien or Manchu rule.[4] When dealing with the relationship between the secret societies and the state, Chesneaux argued that the state found secret societies intolerable because they were based on individual choice and not the clan, family or village bonds.[5]

For Chesneaux then, the rise of secret societies and their opposition to the state throughout Chinese history were caused by both an oppressive elite and the peasants' own primitive sense of nationalism. He also saw a certain amount of continuity to this phenomena. He believed that the Taiping and Nian rebellions were the first stirrings of a peasant movement that would be later shaped by the Chinese Communist Party into "people's war."[6] Chesneaux's class model has since been criticized for not adequately explaining the patterns of cooperation and conflict between the masses and the elite in rural China.[7] The model fails to apply to the presence and activism of the Red Spear

Society and other sectarian militias. The Red Spear Society was extremely conservative and came to blows with the Chinese Communist Party when CCP representatives attempted to incite class warfare. Neither were the members of the Red Spears fighting Mongol or Manchu rule. They were fighting invaders, but whether they were from another village, province, or country, did not matter; it was the threat they posed to the Red Spears' livelihoods that motivated them. Chesneaux's model does not explain why so many Chinese peasants and rural elite were willing to participate in Red Spears. The Red Spears were militia and not revolutionaries, and should be studied as a form of militia in order to better understand their effectiveness at defense and recruitment.

In the late 1960's, when Chesneaux and a few others first started to do scholarly work, military history was quickly falling out of fashion, seen as nothing more than the study of generals and the chronicling of battles. The study of military history, however, has changed significantly over the past twenty years. Military history no longer focuses solely on the battlefield, but on how war and the military have affected and reflected society. The ability and willingness of many of the secret societies to challenge both state and bandit armies, whether using violence in revolt or self-defense, is a significant aspect of Chinese history. More importantly, certain societies, of which the Red Spear Society is a prime example, were formed solely to provide a military solution to a common security problem. This is not to say that military history should dominate the study of secret societies but in some cases it is a necessary component to understanding these groups and the times within which they lived. Certainly this study will show how military history can

enrich our current understanding of the Red Spear Society, the Republican period, the Chinese Communist Party, and peasant activism in China as a whole.

The historiographical studies to date, however, take for granted the validity of Chesneaux's social history approach.[8] There is little concern over why the study of secret societies has developed in this way, or what this has meant to the understanding of secret societies. There seems to be little recognition of the fact that without understanding the military philosophy and methods of a secret society like the Red Spears, there is no understanding of that society. The main reason for this is that at the time when Chesneaux was starting his work on secret societies, academic fashion was changing. Social history and the study of the masses were quickly gaining legitimacy, while more traditional areas like military history were fading away. Chesneaux has been crucial to the study of secret societies by making them the topic of scholarly research. At the same time however, his influence, and to some degree academic fashion, have meant that the study of secret societies has yet to be treated as a military topic, which explains the situation of rebels without a rebellion.

Daniel Overmyer, as a scholar of popular religion, can be considered a social historian, as are many of the researchers in the field. Similar to Chesneaux, Overmyer is dealing with the basic question of the secret societies' role in Chinese life. Unlike Chesneaux, Overmyer enriches the field by recognizing that there was a great deal of diversity in the types of associations to which a peasant could belong. Archival research

has shown that peasants could participate in everything from clan organizations and local defense associations, to guilds and sectarian religions. A great deal of his work has actually focused on examining promises of spiritual benefits and salvation to differentiate between the syncretic sect and other forms of secret society.[9] As a result, the White Lotus society, for instance, is seen as significant for its promises of a renewal of time, society, and government, and the hope this gave its members.[10] Following Overymyer's approach then, the Red Spear Society can be seen as significant for its promises of invulnerability and security, although not necessarily for their ability to provide that security in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Overmyer sees the secret societies' greatest contribution to Chinese society not in terms of their revolutionary potential, but in their ability to provide local organization and meet the physical and psychological needs of their members.[11] For instance, he emphasizes how secret societies not only provided practical training in healing and martial arts, but also created an opportunity for both men and women to gain higher status than would be possible through regular channels. What this has meant is that now the secret societies can be studied in terms of the contributions they have made to peasant life and culture in times of peace. Unfortunately, this also means that the Red Spears who formed in a time of war for war may continue to be misunderstood. Overymer's approach, while pointing in the right direction, does not adequately explain why peasants would join the Red Spear Society.

Similar to Chesneaux, Overymer attempts to use his work on secret societies to

draw conclusions about Chinese peasant society as a whole. He argues that the sects seem to point to basic aspects of Chinese consciousness and social organization which are at odds with the demands of a centralized state. If that were the case, however, sectarian dissent would then be the norm, not the exception.[12] Yet by focusing on the benefits of membership and the ways that sects were able to enrich lives, Overmyer gives participants a rational reason for participation. At the same time this also helps to explain the government's inability to eradicate syncretic sects, as the government failed to provide a viable alternative to sect participation. Overmyer's work not only attempts to identify the roots of dissent and redefine the role of secret societies in peasant life, it also begins to answer the question of why peasants felt the need to participate in these groups in times of peace.

David Ownby, another historian in the field, deals with this very question. Like Overmyer and Chesneaux, Ownby was concerned with the role of secret societies in peasant life as well as what motivated the peasants to join secret societies in the first place. Ownby has approached secret societies themselves as only one part of a larger type of peasant organization which he refers to as the "brotherhood association." He uses the term "brotherhood association" to describe a whole range of popular fraternal organizations which existed during the Qing dynasty.[13] He also attempts to differentiate between more informal forms of brotherhood associations and those which adopted a two character name followed by *hui*. In this way Ownby helps to clear up some of the

confusion in the field. The term secret society itself is difficult to use because of all of its possible connotations. It can refer to everything from the criminal Green Gang to the millenarian Taipings, xenophobic Boxers, and sectarian militia Red Spears.

David Ownby's latest work, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China. The Formation of a Tradition,*[14] attempts to chronicle the origins of these groups in Chinese society, identify why they formed, and place them in the context of late imperial Chinese orthodox society, culture, and official ideology.[15] By examining the popular culture at the time, arguing that the rites, blood oaths, and initiation ceremonies of these groups had deep meanings in peasant society, Ownby sets out an alternative to Chesneaux's explanation of peasant motivation based on primitive class consciousness. This helps to explain why people still risked joining these brotherhood associations even though the government could treat the act as a capital offense.[16] His theory, however, is difficult to apply to the case of the Red Spears. They faced not only government persecution but the constant threat of violence at the hands of bandits, the warlords, the Nationalists, and the Japanese. Brotherhood associations and class consciousness cannot fully account for the commitment of the Red Spear recruit carrying only a spear who faced the likelihood of death and dismemberment when attacking units armed with modern weapons.

While Chesneaux might have studied the ideological or theoretical currents within the rebellions, he did not directly focus on the rebellions themselves or really deal with why they were unable to overcome government suppression. Ownby and Overmyer, while

also contributing a great deal to our understanding of peasant participation in secret societies, fail to explain their ability and inability to defeat the state, and its effect on their popularity. This is not surprising as it would require studying the military aspects of these groups. Many military historians feel that since the 1960s military history has been met with hostility and indifference by the profession.[17] This has had a noticeable effect on the China field in general and the study of secret societies in particular.[18] Even in 1974 John Fairbank noted that while China had a rich military history, historians had failed to write enough about it.[19] Yet understanding why peasants would join the Red Spear Society is impossible without writing about China's modern military history.

War itself is an important and often traumatic part of the human experience, and it deserves more academic attention.[20] To make military history more relevant and more academic, the "new military history" has sought to understand how individual soldiers experienced battle, attempting to reconstruct not just what they could see and hear but also what they felt.[21] The integration of interdisciplinary techniques has also become common. Through using literary criticism, Paul Fussell, for example, attempted to analyze and explain the individual behavior of Second World War soldiers.[22] The introduction of social scientific techniques has given us a much more balanced view of warfare and has also increased military history's utility in learning about society as a whole.[23]

In the case of Western studies of Chinese military history, however, not enough has been done on the basic course of most wars and their effects on the societies that

fought in them or lived through them.[24] More research needs to be done in the West on major conflicts such as the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-45, Taiping Rebellion, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, and the wars between the Nationalists and the Communists.[25] The result is that historians of Chinese history have, in many cases, only assumptions to work with when dealing with these events. It is no surprise then that under these circumstances the combat experiences of secret societies remain largely ignored. Explaining how the Red Spears fought and succeeded opens a whole new area of inquiry and introduces a powerful, yet previously overlooked, new military force into modern Chinese history.

This study notwithstanding the problem remains that there are more questions than answers when dealing with rebellions and sectarian violence in Chinese history. In many cases the questions are quite basic, and potentially valuable in understanding the movements as a whole. For instance, while many rebel groups and secret societies possessed cannon, no one has considered how a civilian group could either purchase or cast their own cannons while authorities looked on. There are no Western studies to date that explain how any secret society has been able to acquire powder of sufficient quality to even make the cannon effective. If a secret society makes its own powder, was this part of the group's teachings? If so, this certainly tells us something about the group's approach to violence. If a secret society expected to acquire these weapons from raiding government offices then certainly their supply of powder and ammunition was limited. This too would affect how they fought, how they prepared for fighting, and their

willingness to fight. Often the secret society uprisings have a very conventional character involving major battles and sieges. Yet in a situation of limited supplies and unlimited intelligence why do they not adopt a more protracted style of warfare? On the battlefield did the insurgents attempt to close for hand-to-hand combat with the government forces? Knowing this would help one to understand the group's tactics and their feelings towards life and death.

One should also consider the fact that a sect is unlikely to rebel unless it thought it had a reasonable chance of at least local success. How did the sects make this judgment? While many works deal with origins, few comment on why the sects felt it was worth the risks and exactly what the risks were. Of course these questions are more applicable to some secret societies than others. Not all secret societies participated in uprisings, in fact many did not, and many that did, did so only sporadically. On the other hand there are some, like the Taipings, the Elder Brother Society (*Gelao hui*), the White Lotus society, and those found in North China during the first half of this century which were extremely violent and had a very prominent martial character.

The Red Spear Society was formed in order to do violence, and combat was one of their chief tools in achieving the goal of stability and security. The two historians with the most to say on the origins and motivations of the Red Spears are Jean Chesneaux and Elizabeth Perry, representing fundamentally different interpretations. Chesneaux portrayed the Red Spears as proto-revolutionaries and a popular opposition to oppression

at the hands of the state or gentry.[26] This explanation over emphasizes the distance between secret societies and the rest of the social order.[27] At the same time it has a great deal in common with Hobsbawm's portrayal of the "social bandit" and underlying assumptions of class conflict.[28] While historians like Hobsbawm and Chesneaux see class conflict as the impetus creating and joining movements like the Red Spears there seems to be little evidence to support this view.

Elizabeth Perry's *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945*[29] is one of the major secondary works dealing with the Red Spears. While Perry recognizes that the Red Spear Societies were a form of peasant self-defense she is not concerned with military issues. She deals with more traditional questions such as why the society was formed, its role in society, and who participated in it. Her work itself is actually attempting to deal with the fact that throughout China's history rural insurgency has tended to be clustered in certain geographical regions, and as such she looks at the rebellious characteristics of the Red Spear Society. Her analysis focuses on the rural inhabitants themselves, emphasizing the adaptive value of peasant violence for coping with the local environment.[30] The Red Spear Society is seen adapting to its situation by moving away from its protective strategy to a more predatory one, and at the same time becoming anti-governmental.[31] Oddly enough, the success or limited success of these movements is not considered a major factor in their continued reappearance.

Perry states that she "has tried to demonstrate the importance of the local environment in inducing and patterning a tradition of rural unrest. ... Chronic rebellion, I

have suggested, was a rational extension of ongoing modes of resource competition, shaped by the natural and social composition of the area."[32] This analysis of the situation is quite similar to those given by Anton Blok, and later Peter Singelmann for the origins of collective violence in Italy and Brazil.[33] Basically, this side of the debate over the motivation of peasant organized violence replaces motivations stemming from class conflict with those stemming from the natural and social environment within which the peasants operated. The view held by historians like Singelmann and Perry, that socio-political and physical environmental factors are key, however, is more acceptable than the class-based theory of Chesneaux. By looking at the peasants' inability to provide for their most basic needs and the factors that contributed to this situation, it becomes plain that, aside from becoming bandits, sectarian militias were the peasants' only hope. Yet while Perry explains why a group like the Red Spears was necessary she does not deal with why a peasant militia armed with spears would consider attacking an opponent armed with rifles. She does not show how it was possible for the Red Spears to succeed beyond recognizing the importance of the "wedding a sectarian tradition of esoteric religious and martial arts practices to the institutional frame work of the militia."[34] Certainly, no matter what the necessity, if the first few Red Spear chapters had been wiped out, few people would have considered participation a viable defense option.

Tai Hsuan-chih's (Dai Xuanzhi) *The Red Spears* is seen by Perry as one of the most important and authoritative works on the Red Spear Society.[35] In describing many

of the battles fought by the Red Spears, he focuses primarily on their origins, organization and make up. While Tai sees the village militia and not the White Lotus sect as the Red Spear's institutional forefather, he does not deal with them as a military organization.[36] He does not explain how they could have been successful, or what kind of threats they could be successful against, or even why some towns chose this form of defense over others.

Overmyer points out that to properly understand sectarian religion, it must be taken seriously in its own right and studied as a religion.[37] Following Overmyer's logic, a group such as the Red Spear Society, which formed for defense through force of arms, should therefore be studied as an armed force. Every aspect of the society, from its dual civil-military organization to its sectarian rites, was directed towards village defense. If historians do not to study these groups on their own terms, they are missing an essential part of these groups' characters. As has been shown by many of the studies in the field, these societies formed within the context of the world around them, and as such reflect that world. For that reason this study does not fit comfortably within the class-based and resource-based debate of peasant motivation which exists in the field. Neither class or rebellion are major factors as the Red Spears involved all strata of society and were only concerned with static defense, not political power. The more fully these societies are understood, the better our understanding of Republican China as a whole.

The current assumption seems to be that the Red Spears were able to win battles because bandits and warlord soldiers were so cowardly and poorly trained that they

opened fire while the Red Spears were still out of effective range. Now this may have been the case, but it still fails to explain how the Red Spear Society could effectively cover the remaining distance, in the words of Liddell Hart, "For so long as a bare couple of yards separates men the bullet can outreach the bayonet."[38] This is not to say that they could not have won; we know that they did, but how? The Red Spears practiced certain rites to confer on themselves immunity versus bullets; knowing how they fought would also help put this in perspective. How much trust did they have in their charms? Did this belief in immunity affect their tactics? Even more basic questions, such as whether or not the Red Spear Society was a successful organization, cannot be properly answered without addressing their military nature. At the same time an increased understanding of the Red Spear's military history would help put the communists' combat abilities and techniques in perspective.

My study seeks to address many of these issues. My key sources are MID reports, which while not referred to by Perry, show how the Red Spears were able to defeat their opponents and still keep casualties low enough to offer a reasonable and popular defense option. The MID reports and the weekly summaries based upon them are valuable for both their size and their accuracy. All of MID's observers had served in the infantry, cavalry, or artillery during the First World War.[39] The observers were also selected because they had shown an aptitude for the Chinese language. They not only received several years of intensive language instruction in China but also served in China for an

additional four or more years. The three main observers Joseph Stilwell, David Dean Barret, and John Magruder all went on to play significant roles in the Second World War in Asia.[40] MID itself had had military attaches in China since 1888.[41] One of the MID's primary objectives was to gain an understanding of each country's ability to make war. To that end the they gathered very specific information about a nation's political, economic and military situations. For this reason the reports often feature very detailed descriptions of battles and their participants. Thus the MID reports provide valuable information about the combat effectiveness of the Red Spears.

There are also several sources available in both Chinese and English dealing with the Red Spears: American military intelligence reports from Japan and China, Allied Translation and Interpretation Service reports, captured Japanese documents, and Chinese and English language newspapers. This study will break new ground in Chinese military history by introducing a powerful, yet previously unrecognized, military force in northern China which restricted the actions of bandit, warlord, Nationalist, Japanese, and on occasion Communist forces. Currently our opinions of the Chinese soldier during this period were shaped by foreign observers who were rarely generous or even well informed. Once one understands how the Red Spears operated and achieved victory the loss of government troops will be better understood. In fact this study will not only help correct the myth of the incompetent warlord soldier, but it will also put the Chinese Communist Party guerrilla in perspective. Once one understands how the Red Spears fought, Mao's own military doctrines seem far from surprising.

Certainly the study of secret societies has come a long way since Chesneaux first started working on them thirty years ago. Not only do we understand secret societies themselves better and the many different forms they could take, but the field has also given us a better grasp of Chinese history as a whole. Yet with so many questions unanswered, each of which potentially having a significant impact on events and providing insight into the secret societies themselves, how can one really take for granted that the social history approach is the only way to study secret societies? This study is the first step in placing military history on the map of secret societies and peasant activism.

CHAPTER 2. Banditry and the Emergence of the Red Spears.

This chapter will focus on describing and introducing the Red Spear movement. It will look at many of the factors which helped bring the group into being, as well as the group's organization, membership, and goals. This will involve not only dealing with the Red Spear Society's characteristics, but also their place in Republican China's history. At the same time it will begin by identifying why the Red Spears were the most significant of the many sectarian militias which operated at the time. Knowing how and why the Red Spears formed is essential to understanding their success at preventing a great many villages from being razed to the ground during this turbulent period. It was the Red Spears' effective defense that was responsible for their popularity and ability to enlist new villages and recruit new members.

Of all the secret societies in Chinese history, why study the Red Spears? What makes them more important to a military historian than any one of the myriad of other rebellions and societies? Partly because of their military character from their first inception, the Red Spears were basically a form of militia. The Red Spears are also significant because they managed to operate openly for more than twenty years. The Red Spear chapters had a membership estimated at over three million men, making them easily the largest sectarian militia at the time. The population of Shanxi was around eleven million in 1922, among whom about six million were farmers; one-sixth of these men joined the Red Spears, a tenth of the total provincial population.[1] While the society itself

started in western Shandong it quickly spread to Hubei, Henan, Jiangsu, Anhui, and Hebei. The society was most active in those parts of the provinces which were under the greatest predatory threat.[2] In Henan province alone there were at least one and a half million Red Spear members.[3] The majority of Red Spear members maintained good relations with other peasants and sincerely wished to help them, affecting far more lives than their actual membership.[4] The effectiveness of the Red Spears movement also saved the homes and lives of many thousands of Chinese peasants, which directly contributed to their popularity as well. It should be admitted however that because of the group's secrecy, it is impossible to know exactly how many members it had.[5] The Red Spears were more effective than any other sectarian militia. They affected not only the millions of peasants in the movement, but also their opponents, the bandits and soldiers against whom they fought.

The Red Spears inspired many other peasants to form their own sectarian militias, including such groups as the Yellow Spear Society (*Huangqiang hui*), Green Spear Society (*Luqiang hui*), White Spear Society (*Baiqiang hui*), and Black Spear Society (*Heiqiang hui*). Some of these developed directly out of the Red Spears as the society's teaching changed slightly over time and new colours were adopted to show the difference.[6]

The Red Spears played a significant part in the events of the time. They were able to provide protection and a semblance of normalcy for many Chinese. If it were not for

the Red Spears, the villages they protected would have met a similar fate to many thousands of others at the time, burnt to the ground. They managed to cause bandits to disperse and halt the advance of soldiers as well as maintain order.[7] Red Spear activities may even have had as much to do with the drive against the Chinese Communists in April 1927 as the Chinese Communist Party's own actions.[8] In the province of Henan they defeated hundreds of thousands of men from the Shaanxi army when it invaded.[9] The Red Spears also assisted Wu Peifu, one of the most powerful and best known northern warlords, in defeating the Second Guomindang Army of Feng Yunian, which saved Wu's army after his losses in Hunan and Hubei. In return for a three year tax exemption one million Red Spears also helped Wu drive the Guomindang troops from Henan, at which point the Northern Expedition of the Guomindang struck east towards Nanjing.[10] After the Japanese invasion, the Red Spears included Japanese soldiers in their list of possible opponents, and patriotic sayings were added to their training. In March 1938 for example, several hundred Japanese soldiers were killed or wounded by Red Spear units on the Tangyinxun highway in northern China.[11] There are records of similar attacks throughout north China from 1939 until 1943, when the MID reports end.

The Chinese Communist Party took an active interest in the Red Spear Society. Was this because they were formed of peasants and could thus play a valuable role in Chinese Communist Party plans? Perhaps this might be the case, but the Chinese Communist Party did not want to just adopt Red Spear members into their own organization. They were more interested in mobilizing the whole society. For instance,

they wanted to bring all the Red Spear groups in Henan to join together to form a communications organ for exchange of information and assistance.[12] Apparently the Red Spears' organization was extensive and well developed enough that it became a priority for the Chinese Communist Party to simply tap directly into it. The Chinese Communist Party also encouraged the Red Spears to attack the rear of Wu Peifu's army.[13]

The Red Spear Societies formed with specific goals which related directly to the need for self-defense in the Chinese countryside. In order to properly explain the Red Spears' organizational, operational, and tactical characteristics it is important to understand the environment in which they operated. Like the militias of Florence four hundred years earlier and a half a world away, or those formed by mandate of the dragon throne in past times of crisis, the Red Spear chapters formed not after, but prior, to the imminent arrival of large numbers of potentially unfriendly military units.

One reason for the emergence of the Red Spear Society and other peasant self-defense movements in Northern China was the uncertain and volatile economic situation, made worse by forced opium planting and the fear and actuality of violence involving theft, kidnapping, torture, and rape at the hands of bandits and government soldiers alike. The popularity of the self-defense movements depended on their ability to effectively meet the peasants needs. The failure of the central government in establishing a stable form of control in the countryside contributed to the cycle of predatory subsistence and perpetual violence which afflicted peasant society.

China suffered from an administrative void in the central government due to the weakness and collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911. The Yuan Shikai dictatorship held up the central authority, but in 1916 after his death any final vestiges of central control gave way. The state broke up primarily along provincial lines and an unsteady rule of numerous contending militarists developed. The political future of these warlords depended more on the strength of their military alliances than on any one government's blessing, and since none of them was able to defeat all their rivals, nor any combination among them permanently viable, China stayed in a state of internal chaos. This in turn led to endemic warfare; between 1911 and 1928 over 140 actions were fought among a total of 1,300 rival militarists.[14] The province of Sichuan, for example, recorded 479 battles between 1912 and 1933, an average of more than 20 battles per year.[15] In 1924 Shanxi province alone had three large armies for a total of two hundred thousand troops. These are only rough estimates, for at the time it is hard to estimate how many troops were there. Each general kept secret the size of his force and he might not have known how many men his subordinates had enrolled, since all officers profited from drawing pay for non-existent soldiers.[16]

The military was at the center of the national stage and violence was the primary tool of politics. Even at its height the Republican government of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek) directly controlled only two provinces; he had to use semi-autonomous or fully independent provincial officials and warlords to exercise control over the rest of China. After the Northern Expedition, the Republican government in 1928 was only able to

exercise authority at the local level by incorporating the existing elite into the government apparatus.[17] They had very little control over the policies and leadership directing the lives of 90% of the Chinese population.[18]

The shifting coalitions of new rulers were unable to impose their control over the countryside, which was increasingly becoming undisputed bandit territory.[19] As the traditional economy in some areas collapsed many peasants were reduced to unbearable poverty or death. As a result of socio-economic decline in the late nineteenth century, bandits had already begun to multiply before and after the Qing collapse; Republican China's constant wars and economic chaos caused a drastic increase in banditry. The people themselves were forced to organize a response to the chaos which was making their lives unbearable. As the provincial leaders fell back on their own provinces, treating them like independent kingdoms, the border regions entered a constant state of chaos and bandit victimization. The Red Spear Society developed out of this void in local power and became the most effective response the peasants had.

The need for a new system of resources acquisition and allocation in this situation was one key factor why the Red Spear Society was initially organized. In the 1930s China's population approached half a billion people, ninety percent of whom were "poor peasants" owning or renting plots which yielded a harvest little better than subsistence.[20] The period of political disorder following 1916 and resultant decline of administrative control destroyed the fragile basis of peasant existence. In fact the original purpose of the

village militias on which the Red Spears were partially based was not only the defense of homes and families, but mutual assistance, and when necessary other essential services.[21]

During the first half of the twentieth century, however, the decline of administrative control was complicated by external factors, the inroads of foreign capital and China's increasing involvement in the international economy.[22] The importation of foreign goods and their distribution in some rural areas at rock-bottom prices often threw local Chinese producers out of business. This in turn led to unemployment and a state of acute economic distress for all levels of China's population. To help cover their own losses many landlords began charging their tenant farmers rents averaging as high as 45% of the harvest. Taxes were collected on everything from chickens to cooking pots, windows to doors. In Sichuan province, for instance, the taxes not due until 1971 were collected in 1933![23] The common practice of usury also subjected the majority of the Chinese population to interest rates from 30 to 100%.[24] As a result, 70% of the population found itself on the verge of bankruptcy.[25]

State administrators, whether legitimate or not, continued to increase their demands upon the people.[26] Backed by warlord guns, Guomindang magistrates and landowners could ignore their traditional obligations.[27] This pushed the peasants to organize armed resistance against the district chiefs and warlords who were responsible for the heavy taxes. The demands and "unfair" obligations not only surpassed the peasants' ability to pay, but also impeded the peasants' ability to generate future wealth. At the same time the government provided fewer services, in many cases becoming

nothing more than the consumer of what little resources the peasants had left. The peasants' subsistence crisis could only be solved by either turning to banditry and predatory subsistence or forming a chapter of the Red Spears for withholding resources from the government.

Farming had become almost impossible throughout much of northern China; it became an insecure activity in the northern regions due to constant warfare between nationalist, communist, warlord forces, and the Japanese Army after 1937. The constant "requisitioning" of draft animals by military forces meant that the farmers lost the livestock that was, among other things, necessary for the production of fertilizer. In order for farmers to maintain their previous levels of fertilization less land had to be sown, which severely reduced the size of harvest and thus the amount of labour needed.[28] The decline in state control also created employment problems, as it meant that there were fewer public works projects and a resultant decline in labour needs.[29] Under normal conditions landless young men became farm workers, employed during the off-season doing odd jobs such as repairing irrigation ditches or mending tools. Many now were unable to find work and turned to banditry in the off-season. As a result not only was there less wealth available for a village to generate, there was an increased chance what little wealth they did have would be taken by bandit gangs of unemployed men.

At the same time the decline in employment opportunities meant that it was difficult to disband military units, as soldiers understandably refused to be demobilized into

a state of poverty and starvation. On those occasion when militarists found it necessary to forcibly demobilize some of their troops these ex-soldiers quickly took up banditry as a means of survival.[30] This banditry further disrupted the countryside, increasing the numbers of men without work or a legitimate form of subsistence, who then turned to banditry themselves. The resulting increase in banditry further impeded agriculture and production, leading to a vicious cycle which only the Red Spear Society was able to break.

Even when there was enough stability and livestock to get a crop off, it was often impossible to transport it because banditry closed many of the roads. If the crop could be harvested and sold this did not guarantee economic security. After 1916 warlords were pressuring landlords to finance their military adventures; in some cases this meant forcing a transition to cash crops, creating the situation where a successful harvest could still mean nothing to eat. The traditional relationship between landlords and their tenants, which had often saddled the former with a certain degree of Confucian obligations, was increasingly overwhelmed by the new one between landlords and the military.[31]

The large numbers of government soldiers did little to alleviate the peasants' problems and often the peasants were quite literally eaten out of house and home. For instance the people of Dongming county in Hubei between February 1930 and January 1931 provided various armies with over 5,000,000 catties of flour, over 7,000,000 catties of steamed bread, 46,000 catties of wheat, 5,600 catties of green beans, 6,000 catties of black beans, 50,000 catties of millet, and so on. It worked out to an average of 20 catties of supplies being requisitioned from each person, not including 53,600 *yuan* taxes taken

from the area and the requisitioning of peasant labour.[32] As a result of the new military system, in the areas without the protection of the Red Spears, eating unripe crops was a luxury and rice or millet husks, tree bark, and even goose droppings were all frequently consumed in bad years.[33]

The danger of famine was ever present and natural disaster was another key motivator behind the formation of Red Spear chapters. Data on Henan indicates that in 1920-1921 there was a famine in the north and west; in 1921 floods caused famine in the 45 eastern districts; in 1923 drought struck 93 districts; and in 1925 flooding of the Huai River led to famine in 30 eastern districts. In 1926, only one year after this string of natural disasters, taxes were demanded in advance for 1928 and 1929, and even for 1930 in certain regions.[34] The weakness of central government control meant that the state was unable to provide the famine relief as it had in the past, thus leaving the peasants to fend for themselves.[35] It also meant that famines occurred more frequently than in the past; the government granaries collapsed and irrigation projects became nonexistent.

Opium production, more than other cash crops, caused serious subsistence problems for peasants. In 1917, opium was banned by the Nationalist government, and as a result its value soared throughout China.[36] Opium, however, could be grown by farmers, and then smuggled into cities like Shanghai and sold for immense profits.[37] The markets for the opium were not just in the port cities; opium growing, selling, and smoking was rife throughout many provinces, and considering the pathetic conditions of many of the

peasants at this time it is little surprise that "chasing the dragon" was a popular escape.[38] The increase in use and profits related to opium meant that farmers were encouraged by local officials to grow opium, creating a situation where both civilian and military officials could make huge profits.[39]

Even American military attaches recognized the problems and profits of opium production. One American military attaché was quite shocked when in 1925 he found opium being grown even within Rehe's urban areas.[40] The government in Rehe raised six million dollars annually by taxing the "illegal" production of opium. When the American officer asked what the official attitude was toward opium planting the official he was speaking to replied that it was, of course, to suppress it.[41] While the opium poppies could pay for Rehe's military forces they could not be eaten by the starving farmers who rarely had enough money left over from their sale to feed themselves or their families.[42]

In desperation large numbers of men and women turned to banditry, on a part-time if not full-time basis. The large number of peasants who turned to part-time banditry is indicated by the increase in lawlessness during those times of the year when food became scarce and there was little agricultural work to be done. The scarcity of food is attested to by the fact that nothing more than grass was often found in the stomachs of bandits cut open after execution.[43] In northern China the agrarian cycle was such that there were long periods when labour demand was low, such as the slack season in the winter and the two months or so following the wheat harvest in the summer. Banditry also increased from mid-June to mid-August as the countryside was covered in sorghum, which afforded

excellent cover even to mounted bandits.[44]

Often bandits operated outside their own home areas, never attacking their own villages as they provided support in the form of shelter and information.[45] The bandits, driven by desperation or occasionally base cruelty, often treated their victims with shocking barbarity, showing little sympathy for the plight of their fellow labourers and farmers. If the bandits could instill enough fear in the surrounding counties it was also possible that their own villages would be safe. Thus turning to banditry became a way to both provide for and protect one's village, farm, and family.[46]

Banditry traditionally flourished only in those parts of China which were situated far from political centers or along national, provincial, or county borders where official jurisdiction was weak and divided, but this was no longer the case during the first half of this century.[47] There were serious crime problems even in those areas under direct Nationalist control. By 1927 official reports spoke of a "crime epidemic" in the Lake Tai area just outside of Shanghai where "armed marauders" robbed, kidnapped and murdered the inhabitants.[48] The situation was even worse in the rural areas of northern China where the Nationalist government failed to project effective control.

By the mid-1920's Hubei was said to harbour roughly two to three hundred thousand bandits clustered along the boundaries with Shandong, Henan, Anhui and Jiangsu.[49] In 1925 alone, Henan province was said to have over five hundred thousand bandits, and in 1930 Shandong could claim over one million.[50] These are also the same

provinces in which the Red Spear Societies were most visible. Throughout northern China in 1932 alone there were 26,946 bandit attacks reported, which resulted in 13,468 captives taken, 530 civilians killed, and 399 more wounded.[51]

The bandits subsisted by extracting taxes from the populace, requisitions, and extortion. They regularly applied "escort fees" in the areas they controlled. Even those roads which the military did manage to keep open out of necessity were by no means safe for travel. Bandits on some occasions derailed trains if tolls were not paid. On May 6th 1923 an express train on the Tianjin-Buguo railway was derailed near Lingchong, a point about midway between Nanjing and Tianjin, by a band of about 1,000 bandits who robbed the train and then retired into the mountains of Shandong, taking a number of foreigners hostage.[52] The taking of prisoners was especially popular and a fairly regularized system for payment developed; it presented the best chance for profit with the least amount of risk. Often local peasants of the poorest sort could freely enter and leave bandit camps, get food from them or sell it to them if they had any to sell.[53] Since they had nothing to steal, and no one to pay for them if taken captive, they were relatively safe.[54]

Bandits were accused, however, of treating the rural peasantry with incredible cruelty if they showed any signs of resistance. MID observers asserted that bandits beat innocent persons with whips, cut them into pieces, wrapped them in kerosene oil soaked cotton and burned them alive, or hung persons upside down while pouring boiling water into their noses.[55] Yet one of the most common and horrifying atrocities practiced by the bandits, or government troops for that matter, was rape. Of all the atrocities that were

committed, rape was the most feared. MID observers often noted that if a large number of soldiers, especially Japanese soldiers, entered a town there was little chance of finding women in the town, as they had already fled and gone into hiding in the countryside. In the classic Cases of Lord Peng, a series of fictional criminal cases devised to convey moral points, rape was ranked as the most vile of crimes.[56] The understandable abhorrence towards rape was so strong that rape was very rarely mentioned, and when it was, it was only alluded to. One writer for the North China Herald in Anhui would only say that horrible things happened to the girl students in the sericulture school when a band of soldiers burst in on them.[57] After Bai Lang's[58] raid on Binxian in Shanxi, reporters alleged that not a single girl over the age of ten was left unviolated.[59]

Possibly even worse was a skin trade that developed in this period to supply wives for men in areas where there was a shortage of marriageable women.[60] Widows and girls between the ages of 16 and 40 were carried away to be forcibly married in other areas. Finding a wife was even a common motivation to enter banditry. In popular novels of the time, as in Tian Jun's Village in August,[61] the characters make constant reference to finding a wife. In Jiangxi, 1931, MID observers estimated that over 20,798 women were kidnapped for ransom, and when the ransom was not produced, they were sold as wives in other provinces.[62]

In many cases official ineptitude and/or dishonesty played a major part in the perpetuation of the chaos in China, which in turn resulted in the formation of the Red

Spears.[63] Ill-prepared local officials thought it wise to protect their careers by ignoring a bandit problem rather then jeopardizing their careers by failure. The fact that the local elite were often involved only made the job more difficult. For many militarists tolerating bandits was an excellent way to maintain free reserves for their armies.[64]

The government soldiers that were sent to put an end to banditry were in many cases at least as bad if not worse than the bandits they were sent to defeat. In fact, sending soldiers to stop bandit abuses was worse than leaving the bandit problem alone, as the arrival of soldiers ensured the end of whatever peace and prosperity still existed in a village.[65] The soldier's commander quickly became the most powerful man in the community in his role as the head of a dangerous band of armed men. He used that power to abuse the community he was to protect.[66] In many cases soldier-banditry was worse than the more traditional forms of banditry. It destroyed a community's ability to defend itself by a combination of official sanction and military force to back it up.

The government soldiers quickly consumed whatever wealth the village had, taking all the carts, boats, and mules in order to carry their supplies. Many times peasants were also conscripted by warlord armies and pressed into service to work the animals and wagons. While in the early years the victims were likely all laborers, as the years progressed, merchants, students and even gentry could find themselves in this position. There are even reports of peasants being sent ahead of an advancing column to trip landmines.[67] An army in transit living off the land would also take pigs and poultry,

vegetables and fruit to eat, and draft animals and able-bodied men to carry their supplies. The soldiers were rarely paid, and they rarely paid for anything they wanted in a village. Worse yet, what they did pay for was paid with basically worthless paper currencies.[68] As a result what little money or currency rural residents had was rarely worth as much as the owner hoped.

The discipline of Chinese Nationalist and warlord soldiers was so poor that desertion, murder, and rape were common occurrences, and what little discipline that existed was a discipline of fear.[69] Japanese soldiers were little better. One captured Japanese soldier admitted to seeing five Chinese militiamen tied to posts and then used for bayonet practice until they died.[70] In many cases the soldiers themselves were unable to deal with the bandits when fighting did start. In some areas soldiers were not permitted to carry guns unless there were more than half a dozen in the group, otherwise they would simply have their weapons taken by the bandits.[71] If the soldiers and the local magistrates were making honest efforts to end the banditry they could expect help from the local Red Spears. In Jiangsu's Suining county the Red Spears participated in the regularly constituted defense force. In 1923 in the Guidie district of Henan the new magistrate refused to continue paying a local bandit. Instead a combined force of government troops and Red Spears were used to eliminate the bandit.[72] They also made rail travel almost impossible because they were so poorly disciplined on the trains that other passengers often refused to ride.[73]

This meant that the farmers had no way to get their goods to market so the prices on local products dropped down to almost nothing and the prices on imports rose astronomically. The Military Commander would soon find his own income falling off because of the decline in trade, and as a result would no longer be able to pay his men. The soldiers would then mutiny, pillage whatever wealth remained in the town and join the bandits they had come to fight. At that point, the bandits would be too powerful for the reinforcements that were sent, and a diplomatic agent would come and enlist all the mutinied soldiers and bandits alike.[74] This would put them all in uniform and on salary for the first month or so, ending the bandit problem, but also subjecting the townspeople to even more soldiers than in the first place. For instance shortly after a large group of bandits attacked a marina in Shanxi, the government sent soldiers, the bandits fled, and the soldiers then paid the bandits five dollars each to hand over the rifles, which they did.[75] This sort of self-perpetuating cycle was played out again and again throughout the 1920s and 1930s.[76]

The Red Spear Society was not the only defense option open to peasants who wished to break free of the poverty and chaos.[77] There were other secret societies, and while not as big, they could join together if the situation was dire enough. There were also local non-sectarian militias, often found in county seats. Relying on government soldiers to protect the village was one option, but as was shown earlier it was not necessarily a very practical one. Even bandits were an option, if your own group of bandits was tough enough to discourage other bandits. Having a Chinese Communist

Party cell was another option, but the Communists were not necessarily focused on defense. Overall, the Red Spear Society was the most popular defense option, primarily because it worked.

Certainly a bandit band was generally a good sized band of armed thugs. While some bandits raided in groups upwards of a thousand, they only formed for a specific raid or specified duration. Generally several small groups of bandits from various villages would come together under a leader and then go marauding. Prior to a campaign the bandit leader would notify his followers who would meet at a predetermined place in their area of operations, and then set up a base camp and strike out to the surrounding areas.[78] These large groups of bandits were forming far from the bandits' home communities for only a short time, and as such were little use for defense. The main problems with relying on one's own home grown bandits for defense was that not only were they generally not strong enough to fight government soldiers, they also tended to attract them.

Yet in many areas bandits were seen as a viable defense option, especially since they would share what little they had with their home villages. Compared to an uncaring government stance it can be seen why banditry was popular.[79] Bandits were likely more stable than soldiers as regular small payments generally kept the bandits happy; after all the majority of bandits were just filling a subsistence need.[80] With this in mind and the fact that most bandits had a home with family and clan ties it is not surprising that bandits engaged in both malevolent and benevolent rule.[81] On one occasion local peasants were

having trouble with some soldiers. While the bandits could not beat the soldiers in battle they did manage to attack and kill the leader of the guard and three of his men.[82]

If Japanese troops moved into the area the bandits generally did not fight; they hid in the hills instead.[83] It was not unusual for bandits to just move their headquarters to the areas bordering on Japanese controlled area, and while this preserved the bandits it did little to help the peasants. The bandits also tended to avoid head on clashes with the government, often looking for an arrangement, which also helped preserve the bandits but did little for the rest of the peasants.[84] A group of bandits in Fujian, for example, could do nothing to prevent northern troops from burning two homes that were accused of harbouring them.[85] All they could do was pay the families compensation.[86] Another serious problem with using bandits for defense was that the professional bandits were just that, professional bandits. When defied a bandit chief was just as likely as an army officer of razing a village, running what can be simply seen as a large, possibly complex, protection racket.[87]

Townspeople could attempt to protect themselves without turning to banditry. Many towns formed their own militias, generally based on militia directives issued by Yuan Shikai and earlier policies. These groups were self-reliant and tended to be focused solely upon their own villages. As a result they had no reserves to call upon and could only handle small bandit gangs and do nothing against bandit armies and government soldiers. For example an unnamed walled town in Heilongjiang was attacked by some five hundred Red Beards while Frank One-Arm Sutton was there. The town had a Merchant

Volunteer Corps of a couple of hundred men, mostly the sons of well-to-do-families, armed with rifles, bayonets, and machine-guns. The town also had over a thousand men in its militia, armed with a few rifles, plenty of muzzle-loaders, swords, spears and axes. Sutton asked why the militia and Merchant Volunteer Corps were not being used to attack the bandits who were raiding the smaller towns nearby. He was told that these forces were for defending the walled town he was in, and that if they did attack the bandits they might just retreat and return with even larger numbers.[88]

The only other option for defense was the Chinese Communist Party. For much of this period, however, the Chinese Communist Party was on the defensive. Around 1933 the Chinese Communist Party found itself broken and confining itself to raids upon undefended towns and villages and guerrilla fighting with government troops.[89] If a village was to be sure of security they had to be in Communist held areas; the communist cells were in the business of guerrilla war, not saving villages from bandit attacks. The Chinese Communist Party attempted to mobilize the Red Spears but met with little success until the 1940s, possibly because they had little to offer. The second problem with the Chinese Communist Party was their stand on land owners. Many of those who organized local defense and bankrolled it were the landowners and elite. In May of 1927, the Red Spears attacked a Chinese Communist Party group which decided to execute twenty-four prominent gentry members whom the Red Spears defended.[90]

When one considers the desperate situation so many peasants found themselves in

it is not surprising that they considered forming a sectarian militia necessary. Numerous sectarian militias appeared throughout north China, of which the Red Spears were only the first and largest. There were also Black Spears, Yellow Spears, Green Spears, Heavenly Gates (*Tianmen hui*), Big Swords (*Dadao hui*) and so on, all of which were very similar to the Red Spears in organization, beliefs, and claims of invulnerability.[91] While similar, these groups did not always get along, only cooperating when the situation was dire.[92] The sectarian militias, however, even the smaller ones, all promised some form of protection through assurances of invulnerability, gongfu training, and at least the potential for cooperation with other similar groups.

The repeated successes of the Red Spear Society helped to make sure that it would be the sectarian militia the peasants decided to join. The earliest substantive account of Red Spear-type activity in the Republican period identifies a group called the Red Flags (*hongqi hui*), active from 1919-1921 in southern Shandong which at the time was menaced by the Sun Brothers Bandit Gang.[93] Between 1919 and 1949, almost any group in Northern China that moved large bodies of armed men about the countryside, or collected "illegitimate" taxes, was likely to run up against armed resistance formed around the Red Spear Society. Formed to protect local resources and lives, the Red Spear Societies most frequently came to blows with the thousands of bandits operating in Northern China during the same time. The various Red Spear Societies also confronted, fought, and on several occasions defeated warlord, Nationalist, and Japanese army units.

Effective resistance and defense required a certain minimum outlay of resources.

While spears were inexpensive, they were not free, and at the very least room and board would have to be provided for teachers.[94] For this reason the impetus for organizing a Red Spear chapter came from a local notable who would also be part of the chapter's leadership. For instance, in order to cope with a group of bandits, who were as much a threat to the local notables as to the poor and middle peasants, all a notable had to do was invite a Red Spear teacher to come to the village. Often for no more than room and board the teacher would begin training the villagers in practical concerns such as organization and martial arts, as well as spiritual concerns such as the proper rites and incantations to bestow invulnerability on a person. Notables in large and affluent localities often became Red Spear chapter leaders; they not only felt they had the most to lose, but could drum up support through kinship and owner-tenant relationships. They were also capable of bankrolling a significant portion of the start up cost, even including the purchasing of guns and ammunition.

The Red Spear leaders were generally already respected and seen as community leaders, often being local landlords, rich peasants, and clan leaders. This meant that Red Spear leaders wielded a great deal of power, in fact edicts from a Red Spear leader could carry more weight than one from a corrupt or inefficient governor.[95] This also meant that the Red Spears leadership was often well educated. They were not only literate but also knew the workings of government and had some idea of the political situation in which the Red Spears operated. This enabled the Red Spears to negotiate with soldiers and bandits

as equals, and to draft agreements with them. It also enabled the Red Spears to pass on accurate information between different chapters about bandit and soldier activities in the area. In fact Red Schools, or Red Spear training halls, taught reading and writing to all members.

At the same time the majority of the rank and file Red Spear members were primarily poor and middle peasants who only took up arms when threatened. The membership of a local unit or chapter might range anywhere from a few dozen to several hundred depending both on the level of threat and size of population in the area. Major individual Red Spear leaders commanded anywhere from thirty thousand to one hundred twenty thousand Red Spears, generally covering from one to two counties.[96] Quite often virtually every household, including landlords, were expected to contribute at least one son to the organization. Red Spear Societies were most common in free-holding villages, where the residents participated voluntarily. One Republican government official sent to try and lead the Red Spears found that almost all the males between the ages of fifteen and sixty in southern Hubei were members of the Red Spears.[97] The massive number of peasants who did belong, however, was a critical factor in making the Red Spear Society successful and in attracting new members.

The Red Spear Society had certain restrictions on membership. Generally the participant had to be both male and over eighteen years of age. If he joined after the chapter was first formed, his background would also have to be vouched for by two Red Spears who had known him for some time. In general however, only one member from

each family was allowed to join. If a family lost all of its breadwinners its situation would be dire as there was no system of insurance. The Red Spears also referred to each other as brothers, and having a father and son do that was considered unnatural, and so a father and son could not both belong to the Red Spears. Deserters from military units were also not allowed to join, neither in many cases were the landless or unemployed.[98] Women were allowed to join, but the girls belonged to branch called the Red Lamp society. They carried red lanterns and tended to be between twelve and sixteen years of age. They also wore strips of red cloth on their head and sashes with characters upon them. These women were mostly trained to defend themselves, especially from rape, and not necessarily participate in battle.[99] The movement became especially popular after the Japanese occupation and the women began to hide small knives on themselves at all times.[100]

Central to understanding the Red Spears is their system of organization. The Red Spear Society used the village as its primary unit of organization. The Red Spear headquarters for a given village were often located within a village shrine or temple, sometimes called "meeting halls" (*huitang*) or "incense halls" (*xiangtang*). If they were organized in an area where Red Spears had been made illegal by the state they used the name Red Schools (*hongxue*) and might use a local schoolhouse as headquarters.[101]

The Red Spear chapters were divided into two parts: a civil or *wen* bureau in charge of records, justice, and finance, and the military or *wu* bureau was in charge of

worship, marital arts, amulets for invulnerability, and so on.[102] The *wu* was also the name given to smallest military unit of five members. This basically allowed the Red Spear Society to take over the role of an absent government in meeting the people's needs. The division also reflected a division in leadership. The civil leader, known as *huizhang* or *xuezhang*, held the real decision-making power over chapter operations. As mentioned these leaders came from local rural elite, meaning landlords and degree holders. Often the village headman and Red Spear leader were the same person. The spiritual leader was the previously mentioned teacher, many of whom came from western Shandong, the breeding ground of the Boxers in 1900.

The military organization went as follows. Every five members comprised a *wu* with its commanding officer, every five *wu* (25 members) formed a *dui* with a commanding officer, every five *dui* (125 members) comprised a *shi* with its commanding officer and so on. This system continued on in this way to a theoretical unit called the *tong* which was to have a commanding officer and about forty nine million men. The *tong* commander was appointed from among the five commanders of the next largest unit, a system which was followed throughout the organization.[103] Each of the smaller units could operate independently against smaller local threats, and then join up to larger, more powerful opponents.

The organization of societies required funds.[104] This is one reason why notables assumed leadership; they contributed the most and had the most to lose. Sometimes a treasury was formed from an initiation fee that was required from new members. In those

areas where each family had to produce at least one member this fee was little different than the levying of a tax on the local population. On the other hand villagers could be assessed a cost based upon their land holdings. Quite often both methods were used. Sometimes a head tax was applied on families, with non-members paying double, thus providing extra incentive for people to join. The other option was to share cost, based upon an assessment according to the possession of lands.[105] Fines were also charged a family if its designated member was absent; they normally amounted to a much larger sum than the standard head tax in the area.

On some occasions, however, the local landlord equipped his tenants out of his own purse, but also required their participation in the Red Spear Society as part of their landholding arrangement. Some landowners would even pay people to become full-time Red Spear members.[106] Most often the participants were volunteers and expected to arm themselves, which meant being equipped with anything from the red tasseled spears from which the group got its name to Mauser rifles and black-powder muskets. It seems, however, that never more than two-thirds of the group were armed with rifles due to a scarcity of arms and ammunition.

The Red Spear members took an oath which obliged them to keep silent about the society and its beliefs, not waste anything, to respect women, and in some cases to abstain from eating certain foods. New recruits were forbidden to have intercourse throughout this training period. Opium smoking, card games, and all acts of violence were also

strictly forbidden, with severe punishments and fines for offenders. If the crimes were severe enough the member could expect to be shot, an interesting punishment for a movement which believed its members to be bullet proof.

The Red Spears were more than just a group of villages united for self-defense or traditional militia. What made them unique from simpler forms of defense organizations were their religious or sectarian practices. In fact some referred to it as the Red Study Society (*Hongxue hui*).[107] These practices are in many ways as important in defining the nature of the Red Spears as their organization and activities. The mystical training of the Red Spear members was completed along with military and martial arts training. It generally took about forty-eight days for a Red Spear to complete "basic" training, but this could change depending upon the immediacy of a threat.[108] After the initial period of training they were considered full fledged Red Spears, and would continue meeting with the other Red Spears to train. After this process, depending on an individual's purity, he was supposed to gain immunity to a whole range of weapons from knives to artillery. At the lower levels one was protected from knives and spears, and at higher levels from bullets. If a Red Spear were wounded or killed by a bullet it was said that he had failed in training.[109] The religious training was important for helping maintain group cohesion in the organization.[110] The actual tenets of their religious training are unclear. Aside from divination practices the religion's only other function seems to have been the granting of invulnerability. It was more mysticism than faith.

To achieve victory the Red Spears, these peasants, laborers, merchants, and rural

elite, had to be willing to risk death and terrible injury. Clausewitz, the Napoleonic general and thinker, may have come close to explaining what courage is. He wrote that danger is essential to combat and that "Courage is, however, by no means an act of understanding, but likewise a feeling, like fear; the latter looks to the physical preservation, courage to the moral preservation." He believed that courage was more than just the counter poise to danger but also a peculiar power in itself.[111] Many believed that militia units did not possess either the cohesion or the discipline to sustain the casualty rates which early twentieth century war required.[112] It was here that their magic made the most difference, helping to produce this peculiar power. Not only were the Red Spears fighting for their homes and families, they also had faith in mystic protection and their fellow Red Spears, which helped them to stay in the field. Their opponents, on the other hand, most often had no real reason to fight, and except for the case of the Japanese, not much more to gain through victory than through falling back.

The first element tying the Red Spears together was a combination of their sectarian and military bonds. Any group being organized to definite principles of military discipline and authority develops its own psychology, its own *l'esprit de corps,* to tie it together.[113] The Red Spears were no different and had military organization, discipline and subordination, as well as their sectarian kinship bonds. For instance the Red Spears of Henan had a regular system of fines and punishments, a director general of discipline, and a general staff composed of experienced advisors, much like a regular army.[114] The basis

for those bonds were not only the oaths they took upon membership and the punishments they faced for breaking them, but also the shared esoteric knowledge they all had in common. Their ritual practices helped them to develop faith in the protection of spirits and to create a group identity apart from the rest of society.

The Red Spears drew upon a long tradition of popular religion and worshipped a number of deities in the pantheon of popular gods, among whom at least twenty-three such deities have been named.[115] Many of the deities were historical figures from popular romances such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*). Practically the only historical figures not worshipped were traitor bandits such as Song Jiang, a character in the *Water Margin* (*Shuhu Zhuan*).[116] They also worshipped Guan Yu, the God of War, as well as dozens of others like Laozi and the Peach Fairies.[117] Along with their worship, members had to observe certain taboos. This could include refraining from sexual relations during the initiation period or more permanent injunctions against eating wild goose, quail, pigeon, dog, horse, cow, shrimp, turtle, and bullhead.[118]

The military training that went along with their religious training was essential in allowing them to defeat much better armed opponents. After the First World War, it was believed it should take about six months to train a man for combat. Liddell Hart however argued that if drill systems were removed, and those parts of the technical and tactical training which go beyond what an infantryman actually needed was cut, they could be trained in six weeks.[119] The Japanese after 1942 were producing infantrymen after only three months of training.[120] The Red Spears' own period of basic training is comparable,

especially when they needed to learn only hand to hand combat, and marksmanship, mortar use, and grenade use were not necessary.

The Red Spear recruit on his first day of training would kneel at an altar until one incense stick had burned down about four inches. This involved kneeling, breathing, and reaching into the air thirty or forty times. This improved stamina, an effect which the members attributed to spirits and not to increased lung capacity and efficiency.[121] This practice is actually very similar to what is practiced in many traditional martial arts schools today. After the period of kneeling he engaged in gongfu practice. Each day he would kneel longer, developing better breathing and a greater faith in his own protection. He would also train in gongfu daily for a period of forty-eight days, after which he would train roughly once a week. It was believed that the longer one could kneel the more protection one would receive from the spirits. For instance, those who could kneel for four days were protected against knives, and those who managed to kneel for a full forty-eight days were protected against guns. These men were called masters, and few reached this point.[122]

They also practiced eating the ashes of amulets. They ate the ashes of paper amulets to provide protection against guns, knives, and swords. The paper was often made of saltpeter and potassium nitrate, a stimulant. The writing was in cinnabar, a traditional tonic, and was believed to calm one's nerves. Most commentators spoke of the changes that came over the Red Spears' faces after they went through this before a

battle.[123] There is an account of a Polish schoolboy from Harbin who was held for ransom by a Red Spear group. While captive he noted that the Red Spears always ate a paper charm before going into combat. The boy took a charm and used it himself, saying it made him feel like a king for at least half an hour, after which he felt dizzy.[124] The reciting of magic formulae would have also helped steel the Red Spears' nerves. Even ordinary peasants commonly recited magic formulae whenever they were confronted with frightening or dangerous situations, calling for the spirits for protection.[125]

They did not, however, depend entirely on blind faith and the taking of drugs. Demonstrations would be given of the different levels of protection so that those practicing the skills would gain faith in them. Protection from swords was granted in a private ceremony. The man to receive protection was stripped to the waist and instructed to kneel before an altar, recite prayers, and swallow the potassium nitrate and cinnabar charms. The man then placed his hands behind his back, closed his mouth and breathed downward like an opera singer. Two others would hold his arms and a third would then strike him three times with a sword until his stomach was red or purple, but not cut. This was not due to magic or a dull blade (as even a very dull blade can cut when swung with force) but rather from a special breathing technique that almost anyone can learn. Of course it was also carried out in private, so if there was a mistake at least not everybody would see it. In fact most martial arts demonstrations today will include this technique; as long as the sword is held perpendicular and the person being struck is breathing correctly the blade will not draw blood.[126]

The ceremony to prove protection from bullets not surprisingly involved a little bit to trickery. This ceremony was held outdoors before a crowd and a group of ten men from the elite and gentry. They were chosen since the peasants were likely to trust them. The ten gentry were given working rifles to inspect and fire into the air. Once they were satisfied that the rifles were working ten Red Spears would strip to the waist, say a charm and rush the men with the guns. The rounds fired at the Red Spears were not real, but had a wax bullet. They also likely had a little less powder, but not so much less that it would noticeably change the kick of the gun. Being shot by the wax bullet at close range would still hurt, and it took an experienced martial artist to take it without going down. This demonstration was done before everybody and would not only strengthen the resolve of Red Spear members but also frighten bandits and government soldiers. It was assumed that bandit gangs would have a member in the crowd who would then report on the effectiveness of the Red Spear magic to the rest of their gang.[127]

This was not the only proof of protection the Red Spears and their opponents had. In battle, as discussed, the Red Spears could minimize the chances of their being hit through cover and their opponent's poor marksmanship. Taken together at long range it was unlikely that the soldiers or bandits could hit the Red Spears, and as a result they would have increased faith in Red Spear magic.[128] Nationalist officers knew that their troops believed in the Red Spear defense as well. On one occasion they took dogs and killed them before battle, smearing the blood on grenades and bullets, telling their men that

this would make enemies' charms ineffective. This in turn managed to scare the Red Spears.[129] Smearing blood all over one's bullets was a good way to invite a jam in automatic and semiautomatic weapons, and was thus a rare phenomenon.

The Red Spear Society was formed out of desperation, as no one else was going to protect them. Its members could not sit back, or quit the field, confident in the knowledge that if they failed somebody else would be along to try again or do it for them. They were the last line of defense, and certainly in their minds a failure on the battlefield was a failure to their villages, clans, spouses and children. More often than not their opponents did not have as much to fight for. For bandits, often starvation or at least the threat of starvation was a key motivator. The point for a bandit was to subsist but not cease to exist. For this reason it was often better for bandits to avoid resistance if it grew too strong. The bandits, however, were mobile and could always move on to a more vulnerable village, town or county.

For a warlord or Nationalist soldier the situation was not that different than the bandits; in fact many had been bandits at one point or another. Most did not think they were paid enough to die for no reason. In fact, in some campaigns and battles money was more decisive than bullets.[130] This is not to say that they were not capable of valor or fighting, but killing peasants was hardly valorous. The quality of a warlord's soldiers could vary greatly between units; Wu Peifu's own troops varied greatly both from the point of view of military training and their moral and steadfastness.[131] Most often the weaker units would be in charge of plundering the countryside. The soldiers were also

often in small groups and badly outnumbered by the Red Spears, with little apparent chance at victory, at least not without sustaining severe and seemingly pointless casualties. If the soldiers fell back, and did so soon enough, they were unlikely to be killed. Even better they could head back to their supply areas, get reinforcements, and return. Better still if the Red Spears were not defeated then the soldiers would continue to have a job. If there was no chance of retreat, however, or it was clear that if they did not fight they would die, then it was quite possible for the soldiers to put up a real fight.

The Japanese soldier was different again, and his willingness to fight helps to account for much higher casualties suffered by the Red Spears while fighting the Japanese. Many Japanese soldiers believed they would be shot upon return to Japan for retreating from the enemy. Worse than that they would have dishonored their families, country and emperor. They feared being ostracized by their families and most of all, many of the Japanese soldiers who were captured by allied troops and later interrogated said they would not return home.[132] On the other hand if they died fighting they were assured of a reward and their families would be honored and in theory receive a pension.[133] They feared shaming their families. In fact the vast majority of Japanese prisoners were only taken after they had fallen unconscious from wounds or disease, or were too sick, starved, or injured to resist.[134]

Throughout the period from the early 1920s till the 1940s, no matter what triggered the mobilization, the Red Spear chapters invariably responded in the same way.

They mobilized and attacked before enemy troops or bandits reached their home areas. The Red Spears' method of organization meant that they had little choice but to mobilize before troops arrived if they hoped to be effective. This is because they maintained the strategic defensive by means of being operationally offensive.

Red Spear Societies consistently chose to initiate the attack, hoping to win through great battles and a single decisive blow. This is why the Red Spears often seemed to attack bandits and soldiers without provocation. The Red Spears' aggressiveness was not caused by blood thirstiness or peasant ignorance, but by a good understanding of the situation at hand. First of all, if the Red Spears waited for bandits or soldiers to arrive in their home areas, or waited too long after they arrived, there would be little left for the Red Spears to defend. Secondly, initiating the attack would allow them to optimize local terrain and cover. Finally, while they could deny food to the bandits and soldiers they had little extra for themselves. As a result they pursued great battles, the chief objective of which was destroying an enemy's military force.[135] This does not necessarily mean total annihilation of an invading force; destroying the enemy's ability to apply force through military means was the objective. Thus it could mean dismantling the portion of that force that seemed to threaten Red Spear base areas or destroying enough of the enemy's manpower to force concessions.

Like the communist guerrillas, in order for the Red Spear Societies to be effective a certain amount of security was needed in their home areas. This would allow them to form, organize, train, arm, and gain public support.[136] In fact, maintaining a safe base area

or "sanctuary" and relying upon the local population for support in the form of provisions, intelligence, and personnel has been seen as the key for the success of any irregular force.[137] Sustaining their influence, however, required the Red Spears to be effective, satisfying the population by helping things to remain relatively tranquil.[138]

Military units moving through a county often attempted to swell their numbers through conscription and pressing local men into service. This posed a serious threat to the effectiveness of the Red Spears as it would hinder their ability to raise enough members to defeat the soldiers. It weakened public support for the Red Spears as well as reducing the number of men actually available to be raised. There were reports of military units stripping every village through which they pass of every able-bodied man they could find.[139] In the spring of 1943 the Red Spears reached their southern limit and were very active in northern Jiangxi and Fujian. Many of the peasants who joined the society did so to protect themselves from conscription, which in turn led to direct confrontation with Nationalist army units.[140] In order for the Red Spears to achieve their goals it was best to avoid the presence of soldiers altogether, which in turn required them to fight major engagements in the hopes of gaining a decisive victory before or shortly after the soldiers arrived.

Once bandits or government soldiers managed to establish themselves within a county the whole point behind the Red Spear organization quickly disappeared, as soldiers and bandits helped themselves to what the Red Spear Society was meant to protect.

Worse yet if the Red Spears were unwilling to give battle to a regular military force these soldiers would then try to force a confrontation with the Red Spears through pillaging peasant grain stores and stealing livestock.[141] In fact if the soldiers could wear the peasants down by destroying their subsistence base then the Red Spear activity would also come to an end. While it is difficult to estimate the influence of fear upon Red Spear methods, the fear of what would happen if the soldiers were allowed into their home district certainly played a critical role in how the Red Spears chose to operate.[142] This meant that even the possibility that a group of soldiers or even bandits was going to move into the county was enough to mobilize the Red Spears and provoke an armed confrontation.

It was also important for the Red Spear Societies to avoid a siege situation. They had to attempt to bring soldiers and bandits to battle before they could reach a walled town. Once they reached a walled town they preyed on the town's inhabitants and could be dislodged only after a lengthy siege. The Red Spear Society, because of its organization, had very little permanency once mobilized. As in other militia, the Red Spears chapters were specifically raised and mobilized whenever there was a threat to local order. Even in the period of greatest militarization, there was a considerable fluctuation in the size of militia forces depending on the perceived immediate danger to local order.[143]

In January 1927 the Tenth Division of the Zhengao army was occupying the county seat of Xinan in Henan. The troops were stationed in all the surrounding towns,

where they began to forcibly levy taxes and behave in unruly ways. The people in the eastern part of the county organized a militia affiliated with the Luoyang Red Spears in order to fight the government soldiers. Together the two Red Spear Societies fought with the Tenth Division for only half a month, forcing the Tenth division to call on reinforcements from another province. Once the reinforcements arrived the army units pillaged an area of several miles and finally left the civilian population alone.[144] The brevity of Red Spear mobilization in this example was typical. In fact it was almost unheard of for a Red Spear Society to be active for more than a few weeks at a time. Depending on the level of the perceived threat the number of Red Spear members mobilized into the field also changed.

The reason they could not mobilize for long was that there was no organized logistic system to provide supplies. They were also a militia organization, and the longer they were away fighting, the longer they were absent from farm and family. For many the whole reason they joined the Red Spears was to avoid prolonged military service which not only separated them from friends and family, but also left their homes and crops undefended. The dominant economy of China was still that of the village, in which the agricultural peasant worked and lived, and in which the local economy was largely self-sufficient.[145] It was also within this system that the Red Schools were set up and Red Spears organized and operated. Myer's work *North China Villages* gives a good example of what most villages were like. The village of Shajin on the north China plain, with 69

households, is one example he uses. It was north of Beijing and half an hour's walk from the county seat of Shunyi. There were several lineages in the village and it produced sorghum, corn, millet and vegetables. The villagers ate the corn and millet while selling the sorghum and vegetables for cash. The majority farmed less than three acres, and had to buy grain as they could not produce enough to meet their needs. Only a quarter of the households farmed their own land and were able to support themselves. The rest were involved in owner-tenant relationships to one degree or another.[146] With villages living so closely to the subsistence level most counties could only support an extra few thousand men for a limited period of time before they consumed everything they mobilized to defend. Often mobilized Red Spear Societies would turn to banditry and predatory practices in order to stay in the field and continue defending their own homes.

In one instance in Henan, the local Red Spear Society had to mobilize 100,000 members three times to engage a group of government soldiers who took the walled county seat in Lushi county. As they were unable to stay in the field for long they mobilized just long enough for their numbers to grow to the point where the soldiers felt threatened and made concessions to the Red Spears. Each time they gathered they forced the soldiers to agree to abolish all illegal and excessive taxation and stop entering villages.[147] On another occasion in the spring of 1927, fighting took place in Feixian, Guangping, Chengan, and Linzhang counties in Henan between the Red Spears and the First Army of the combined Hebei-Shandong forces. After several days of conflict a committee was established to negotiate peace.[148] Considering the militia nature and goals

of the Red Spears, and their inability to stay in the field for more than a few weeks, it is not surprising that they were willing to negotiate. Which side opened negotiations is not known.

If the Red Spears fought and won in the field they could resupply from captured equipment.[149] Things changed radically once warlord soldiers took a town. After taking a town, likely the county seat as it would have walls, soldiers could begin billeting themselves with the citizens and confiscating grain. This made it difficult for the Red Spears to mobilize as their source of food was removed. Since artillery was rarely used by bandits, Red Spears and even soldiers, the towns walls made a swift victory difficult. The soldiers would also cut down the crops and trees around the town walls for several hundred meters.[150] This meant the Red Spears were completely exposed to the soldiers' rifle fire during an attack, and had no choice but to fall back.

On another occasion in Henan soldiers looted Loushan county and burned scores of villages. The society members from several counties united into a group of several thousand but failed to prevent the soldiers from taking the walled county seat.[151] The grain surrounding the town was about a foot and a half high, providing the Red Spears scant cover for approaching the walls. The Red Spears never came closer than eight hundred yards to the wall as they were only armed with spears and this was the limit of the soldiers' effective range. There were no casualties on either side and the Red Spears fell back.[152] Without artillery, or at least covering fire, even with ladders the Red Spears had

little hope of taking the twelve meter wall.[153] In fact as long as neither side had artillery the towns were of great defensive importance. Unfortunately for the Red Spears the government soldiers could normally get artillery support if they had enough time.

Garrisoning a walled town was even more dangerous for the Red Spears than taking one. The Red Spears would on occasion garrison a town for one reason or another; perhaps they mobilized too slowly or it might have been human error, or they hoped that the government troops or bandits would go home. Against bandits this might have been possible, but against soldiers it was disastrous. On one occasion the Red Spears actually guarded several Shandong cities against bandits for over half a year. They lived in temples and vacant buildings, and prepared their own food, relying on the locals to supply them with food and fuel.[154] Once the Red Spears were in a town, however, there was little they could do against warlord or nationalist troops. It was difficult for them to use their rifles on the walls as attacking soldiers would use shrapnel to clear the walls. Even if the Chinese artillerists were unable to cause causalities they could at least keep the walls clear of defenders. This would allow the attacking soldiers to reach the walls and mine them. Then they could enter the town under the cover of rifles and machine-gun fire.[155]

Holding towns against Japanese soldiers was especially suicidal. The Japanese would come at the town in four columns. Three columns would attack, one at the front, and then one on either side. Artillery would be used to open breaches in the walls, and tanks were pulled up to keep the walls clear. The town's rear was left open, the fourth

column waiting for the Red Spears or irregulars to retreat into the open where they could be contained by the infantry and blocked off from the town by the tanks.[156] Tanks could be found with most major Japanese forces and were used extensively as infantry support.[157] In eastern Hubei during the two weeks ending on September 4th, Japanese troops cleaned out twenty-two walled towns, and had nine other engagements, routing some four thousand four hundred guerrillas.[158] The Red Spears could take significant losses and because of their cellular organization, they could continue to operate.

Taking losses, however, was something the Red Spear chapters had to avoid, and so they changed their own practices in order to better deal with the Japanese army's tanks and artillery. According to missionary reports the walls of many cities in areas threatened by Japanese were being razed by the Chinese themselves. The idea was that walls could be easily taken by the Japanese and just as easily held. On the other hand if a town had no walls the Japanese could not hold it against irregulars except with a large garrison.[159] The Red Spears in Japanese held areas began launching their attacks in the dead of night. They would disguise themselves as firewood peddlers, and hide their spears and rifles in with the rest of their wood. Once inside a garrisoned town they would form up at a predetermined point and time and light a signal fire. The sleeping enemy would be caught off guard, and the gates could be opened to the rest of the Red Spear force. Japanese forces suffered many losses to these attacks and used increasingly large garrisons in response.[160]

The Red Spears not only opposed opium and bandits, but also the warlord

governors of the provinces and government troops. Combined with their ability to withstand Japanese attempts to suppress them, the Red Spears played a major role in the military-political situation of the time. It was their ability to withstand attack and attack successfully with few losses that helped make the Red Spears such a popular defense option. Now that the Red Spear Society has been discussed in its historical context we will examine exactly how it was that the Red Spears were successful at defense. Political and economic instability were key factors in making the Red Spear organization necessary, but, as will be shown in the next chapter, it was their effectiveness as a militia that made them popular.

CHAPTER 3: The Red Spear Society in Action.

This chapter will focus on the Red Spears in action and show that the Red Spear Society was a viable and rational defense option for the Chinese peasant. This will be done by examining how the actual operation of the Red Spear system of organization and their utilization of intelligence allowed them to consistently defeat bandits and government soldiers alike. We are concerned with both the Red Spears' ability to defeat their opponents and their skills at sustaining minimal losses to themselves. To this end we will look at their field tactics and the effective disparity in arms between them and their opponents. We will observe in this chapter that the Red Spears, magic aside, formed an effective and rational defense strategy for the rural population of the North China plain. The effectiveness of defense accounts for the popularity of the Red Spears.

The organizational methods of the Red Spears were a key factor in the sectarian militia's success. The Red Spear Societies were weak on the strategic offensive, being virtually unable to project force, but very powerful on the defensive. Attacking for revenge was rare. Instead they generally mobilized only in response to the immediate threat of bandits or soldiers entering their home areas. While the actual organization of the movement has been described both here and elsewhere there has been little analysis of how it both aided and hindered the Red Spear Societies in successfully defending their homes and livelihoods. The Red Spear Societies were organized in such a way as to allow

them to mobilize quickly and in large numbers.

While the number of Red Spears present at an incident is often mentioned, its significance is often left unsaid. In order for the Red Spear Society to be successful it had to mobilize more soldiers than its opponents could. This does not mean they had to outnumber the whole of the enemy force, but they had to gain at least local superiority in numbers. In fact the whole secret of war as proposed by Clausewitz was to bring up superior masses in a certain time at a decisive point.[1] The organization of the Red Spears and many of the other sectarian militias were ideally suited to raising large numbers of soldiers on relatively short notice. The Red Spears' hierarchical military organization was based on older forms of militia. It allowed militias from several towns and counties to work together as a single unit.

As the Red Spear Society operated in a densely populated environment they rarely lacked manpower; it was more a question of how to apply it. In order to organize large numbers the Red Spears had to overcome two problems: self-interest and the difficulty of organizing, commanding, and controlling literally thousands of men from hundreds of villages. Diana Lary has pointed out that the chronic insecurity of the time prevented concern for others. It forced people to rely on only the most basic units of society, in this case their own family unit. This concern for only the immediate family is called amoral familism.[2] China is a large country and bandits can ravage some parts while leaving other sections with only the fear of attack. In fact it was still considered safe for foreign visitors to tour these areas in 1925.[3] Still the basic unit of Chinese society was the family. The

interest of the family traditionally came first, and in the backdrop of the chronic fear and chaos of the warlord period, the strength of amoral familism that developed is not surprising.[4]

Bandit gangs containing 800 to 2000 men were not uncommon.[5] Throughout the 1920s bandit bands became larger, better organized, and more powerful. This only increased the need for several villages to cooperate in defense. For instance in Henan, Lixian's townsfolk alone resisted a bandit army for over a month before the town finally fell. When the bandits got inside they took revenge upon the citizenry for having put up resistance. It was reported that everyone was killed, save for young girls who were carried off to a more terrible fate.[6] Roughly 8,000 citizens lost their lives in this one attack, a testament to what happened to those cities who had to rely solely on their own citizenry to defend themselves. One-arm-Sutton, a well known adventurer in China during this time, recorded one incident in his journal which illustrates how Lixian could have been left to its own devices. While he was in Manzhouguo a large force of bandits attacked villages near the town he was in. While the town had a sizable militia of several thousand men it felt that there was no reason to use these forces to fight the bandits. The militia forces existed to protect the city and the bandits attacked just outlying villages, not the city.[7]

The Red Spear Society had to break the trend of amoral familism in order to organize the large numbers needed to succeed. This was partly done for them by previous

successes and partly because of their organization. The basic unit was formed out of the existing social units, and so the bond between these men was already strong. From there they took oaths and learned special rites which created fictive kinship ties which extended to all Red Spear members.

Most Red Spear teachers operated on a rotation basis, going from one hall to the next in a circuit. The leaders or teachers often stayed with a particular Red School until the initial training was completed. After about two months he moved on to begin training the next Red Spear Society. Often a second teacher came to a group after the first teacher left in order to teach a new set of skills. In this way the different societies would be connected by personnel relationships facilitating future cooperation and leadership.[8] As the numbers of Red Spear Societies increased the number of ties grew larger. Even if a given group of Red Spear chapters felt only loyalty to the groups in the adjacent villages, each group would extend the web of loyalty further. In this way the Red Spear Societies could field hundreds of thousands of troops when necessary.

One could generally expect to find around a thousand men per county or *xian* with a walled city surrounded by some five to six hundred square miles of countryside. The county formed the base of the government pyramid and the peak of the local Red Spear organization.[9] Generally the largest group of Red Spears in a county would be located in the county seat. This is because it not only had the largest population, but the wealthiest. This was often the first site occupied by invading soldiers or marauding bandits, yet its loss never knocked out a county's Red Spear chapters. Larger towns used their own Red

Spear population for defense; smaller towns combined members from two or three counties.[10] Often Red Spears from a nearby county came to the city's aid, and the remaining local Red Spears joined up with them. Ideally however, the bandits or soldiers would be defeated before they could take the county seat.

The units and society branches in various locations were to consider themselves equal, and not rank themselves hierarchically by location.[11] This method of organization allowed troops to be called from several different districts and quickly come together into larger units with a previously established command structure. This enabled large numbers of Red Spears to mobilize quickly in and around a threatened area. Many of the other sectarian militias were organized in a similar way, thus enabling them to work together when necessary. In the spring of 1926 for instance, the Red Spears quickly mobilized several thousand members in western Henan, enough to out maneuver and then gain the surrender of over ten thousand Shaanxi government troops.[12] It is important to note that it was also this form of organization that made the Red Spears too extensive for one local organization to control, which in turn enabled them to continue to effectively defend local interests.[13]

In fact, if enough Red Spears were present it was even possible to gain victory, or at least limited victory without having to risk lives in combat. In 1923 for instance the First Mixed Regiment and the Second Route Guards were stationed in Lushi in Henan. The two units required more than 14,000 yuan per month, in addition to food and

incidentals, which was collected from local residents. In August the local Red Spear Societies mobilized along with several other self-defense societies. They then surrounded the county seat with several thousand members, enough to scare the commanders of the two units to agree to withdraw some of their troops elsewhere, cut the remaining soldiers' pay in half, and restrict them to the county seat itself.[14]

Regardless of the opponent the Red Spear Society was flexible enough to mobilize as many or as few man as were necessary. This is demonstrated by the difficulty involved in estimating the number of Red Spears and other sectarian militiamen. The American military attaches in China were fairly sure that there were more than three hundred thousand militiamen, but try as they might they did not get a solid number.[15] United States Military Intelligence put the number of bandits in northern China at two hundred thousand in 1924, and the number of soldiers at one million.[16] A similar report a year earlier noted that several hundred thousand armed bandits maintained some semblance or military organization, whose ranks were predominantly from the soldiery.[17] Anna Louis Strong notes an instance when the Christian General Feng Yuxiang's troops entered and began to search for provisions in an area in which existed a similar sectarian militia to the Red Spears, the Heavenly Gates. A group of over 8,000 well organized peasants met them and politely refused to give them bread, allow them into their homes when it rained, or give them water. The solders turned about and without giving battle returned to Zhengzhou in Henan.[18]

The Red Spears' method of organization was not just about numbers, however,

but speed as well. The ability for large numbers of Red Spears to gather would have done little if they were attacked while still attempting to mobilize. In order for them to successfully apply the force they had it was crucial that they mobilized quickly. If they could mobilize quickly small, local Red Spear units could counter localized threats before they could do damage. This in turn made it almost impossible for small groups of bandits and soldiers to operate in Red Spear territory. Basically the Red Spear chapters had to come together, organize, prepare to fight, and attack before their target knew it was coming. They were fast enough to hit their opponent before the soldiers or bandits could make it to the nearest walled town, set up artillery, fortify positions, and most importantly before their opponent could bring up reserves. Certainly the ease in which different Red Spear chapters could come together and organize was essential. Even more important to Red Spear effectiveness was their ability to get the word out that mobilization was necessary, and then to mobilize faster than the response of their opponent.

The Red Spear chapters utilized a fairly efficient system of mobilization. It relied on a combination of hand passed letters and raising alarm through bells, drums, or cannon. If villagers discovered a bandit gang or marauding military force, an alarm would then be sounded by ringing a bell, blowing a horn, or beating a gong. When the next village heard the bell ringing they would raise their own alarm and the alarm would thus sound through the county. In this way they brought Red Spears together from all the surrounding villages.[19] As the alarm was raised the Red Spear members took up their spears and

headed towards the village where they heard the alarm, and from there down the line of villages to the one which raised the initial alarm where the other Red Spears were already mustering. If time allowed, the passage of notes or letters also helped to warn of larger menaces. Red Spears from as far away as a hundred miles could be mustered to an assigned place within a week of the notice going out. Mobilization notes were written on yellow paper and passed from one village to the next, allowing fast and accurate communication, covering up to thirty miles a day.[20] The Red Spears were also often prepared to mobilize even before the alarm occurred. The Red Spears had contacts in all levels of rural society which allowed them to anticipate trouble. There are accounts of the Red Spears mobilizing in response to the imminent demobilization of troops, an event the whole community would know about.[21]

The speed of Red Spear mobilizations was one of the factors that made them such a threat to armies operating in the area. It created a situation for Japanese soldiers that was reminiscent of Spain during Napoleon's invasion. So deadly was the threat from partisans that an officer carrying a dispatch to or from France required an escort of as much as 200 cavalry.[22] After 1942 there were large areas beyond the towns and cities, and transport lines, in Shandong, Hebei, and Henan in which the Japanese troops refused to enter in forces smaller than battalion size.[23] A battalion is the principal unit of infantry and generally contained at least six hundred men. Certainly the Chinese Communist Party was active in these areas, but Chinese, Japanese, and American reports attribute the majority of attacks to irregulars and peasant militiamen. The Japanese often complained

of enemy infiltration behind their lines, more often than not it was the ability of the Red Spears and similar groups to mobilize, strike a small Japanese party, and then demobilize as quickly that caused the problems.[24] Every time a warlord or a Japanese commander concentrated his troops for an attack they quickly lost control of the countryside. Their numbers invariably dropped low enough for the sectarian militias to mobilize undetected and in strength. Sectarian militias, primarily the Red Spear Society, contributed greatly to Japan's having to garrison several thousand combat troops away from the front lines just to keep the roads and rail lines open.[25]

Of course an important facet in Red Spear mobilization was their ability to mobilize for battle faster than their opponents and then demobilize back to their farms before reinforcements arrived. It would not have mattered how quickly the Red Spears mobilized if their opponents, the warlord, Nationalist, or Japanese militaries could mobilize as quickly and thus bring them to battle. It was important that the Red Spears attack quickly and with superior numbers to allow short decisive battles and make up for the disparity in arms. The Japanese for instance relied on wide enveloping maneuvers. Once a Japanese unit engaged or was engaged by a group of Red Spears, the Japanese commanders would attempt to keep the engaged force fighting long enough to maneuver a second and third column around the flanks of the Red Spears and fall upon them from the flanks and rear. If the Red Spears failed to mobilize and defeat the Japanese unit quickly they would be both surrounded and annihilated. Because of this it was important for the

Red Spears to mobilize without the awareness of the Japanese. Speed was thus crucial as the longer mobilization took, the better the chance of the Japanese finding out about it.

The fact that the Red Spears mobilized out of the very countryside around their opponents also helped speed up their attack. The dense population in much of rural China meant that there were likely thousands of Red Spears within only a few days' travel to their intended target. The Red Spears' opponents, however, had to contend with moving large numbers of men over long distances with little infrastructure.[26] Western observers, however, often commented on how there was little understanding amongst Chinese officers of transportation, and even less ability to concentrate men and the supplies they needed at a given place.[27] In fact Chinese officers were rarely present during the organization of a food convoy or ammunition train.[28] The modern rifles, machine-guns, and artillery would be of little benefit to a warlord's soldiers if they had insufficient ammunition. In many cases their ammunition supply was no better than that of bandits.

Logistics were not as serious a problem for the Red Spears as they were for their opponents. The Red Spears did not have to rely on vast amounts of ammunition, and since they were only in the field for short periods, they did not need large stockpiles of provisions. The logistic problems of the Red Spears' opponents' were aggravated by China's lack of transportation infrastructure. Once again, because the Red Spears did not rely on modern equipment, they did not need a modern highway system, giving them a distinct advantage over their better armed opponents. It was possible to travel for many miles through thickly settled country without seeing a single road or bridge. In many

places the footpaths were too narrow to allow even two men to walk abreast, causing units to stretch out into several kilometer long khaki ribbons. This also made it almost impossible to move artillery and large amounts of any type of supplies.[29]

It was estimated that in 1928 China had about 1,700 miles of road, 500 miles of which were urban. By comparison the state of New York, at the time, had about 81,878 miles of roadways, not counting city streets.[30] The almost total absence of improved roads meant that even those units with motorized transport could do little better than crawl along. The massive amounts of dust kicked up by a motorized column contaminated oil and gasoline, entered moving parts, and caused abrasion and breakdown. The impure water when put into radiators led to overheating and subsequent motor difficulties.[31] In Yunnan there were no roads at all, just trails; some had had round stones added while others were filled with mud or were used for irrigation.[32]

The only way to move men was on foot, and unless one knew the way it was slow going. Having to carry large amounts of ammunition or heavy mortars and machine guns aggravated the problem and slowed soldiers down even further. Moving at night was almost impossible. Even under the best conditions the Red Spears could still cover more ground on foot in a day than the Chinese soldiers they fought. While individually good at marching, the mobility of larger Chinese units was poor by Japanese or Western standards. The Red Spear units were more mobile than the Chinese military units because of better discipline and organization.[33] The Red Spears were also more mobile than the many

bandits who traveled on foot and did not know the area. This allowed the Red Spears time to mobilize and deal with the bandits long before they could hope to escape. So as the warlord and central government soldiers struggled down narrow paths under the weight of modern arms and ammunition, the Red Spears moved swiftly to congregate and attack them.

The Red Spear units even managed to mobilize and move faster than Chinese cavalry units, government and bandit alike. The cavalry units the Red Spears had to face most often were dragoons. They were mounted infantry, ideally able to cover more than the average infantry's maximum of thirty kilometers in a day. Cavalry, however, was rarely a serious threat to Red Spear units; its numbers were too small and it rarely moved faster than the infantry, often moving at little better than five kilometers per hour.[34] The cavalry itself lacked both rail and motorized support, making it difficult to employ quickly. Cavalry was also expected to live off the land foraging and requisitioning food for man and animal. This made the cavalry units twice as costly as a normal infantry unit and more likely to come into conflict with the Red Spears. The largest cavalry units were found in Jiangsu and Manchuria, and even those were never larger than a division. At the same time their arms were little better than those of the Red Spears. Much of the Jiangsu cavalry was equipped with lances; the rest had swords, pistols, and carbines.[35] Under such circumstances, with little superiority in arms and too few numbers, cavalry units were easily defeated by Red Spears units.

The most dangerous cavalry threat faced by the Red Spears was Lao Yangren, or

"Old Foreigner," a bandit leader who led several thousand bandits. His group was broken up into between twenty and thirty gangs. It was said that they were capable of covering seventy miles in a night after a raid. This was twice as fast as any of the warlord cavalry units, and he successfully raided in Henan and Anhui for years before Wu Peifu pacified him by offering him an army post.[36] It was Lao's speed and mobility which were considered most remarkable at the time and was a key factor in his success, which in turn shows how important speed and mobility were.

One of the biggest potential threats to the ability of the Red Spears to keep their home villages free of soldiers was the railway. The railway could potentially move large numbers of men, massive amounts of supplies, and thousands of rounds of ammunition to areas of Red Spear resistance before the Red Spears could defeat their opponents and demobilize. In Europe railways revolutionized the mobilization of armies, but this was not the case in China. China only had about 7,700 miles of railway, only an eighth of what existed in the United States at the time.[37] What little rail there was, while considered valuable, was often used inefficiently. Wu Peifu for instance failed to realize that railroad management was a profession, and his officers only managed to move fifteen trains past a given point a day, while a standard civilian manager could move two to three times that many. In China, because of poor management, a single track of rail would only be able to support about ten thousand men, when its true potential was closer to two hundred thousand men.[38] This helped to ensure that when the Red Spears mobilized they achieved

local superiority in numbers, and defeated their opponents long before reinforcements could arrive.

Certainly the way in which the Red Spears were organized was critical in their ability to successfully defeat their opponents. Their biggest advantage over their opponents was in intelligence. It let the Red Spears know how many members had to be mobilized where and when to give them the best chance of success. With the rural population providing active support an increasingly effective intelligence monopoly developed. Thus the Red Spear Societies operated with excellent operational and tactical intelligence while their opponents, the bandits and especially soldiers, were less effective. In many ways the Red Spears' intelligence monopoly, and not their magic, protected them from their enemies' bullets.

Operational intelligence basically refers to up-to-date information about the enemy, his locations, numbers, and disposition.[39] It acted as a force multiplier, allowing the Red Spears to achieve greater results on the battlefield at a lower cost.[40] This was crucial for the Red Spear Society as they had to cope with a disparity in arms while still trying to keep casualties to a minimum. Keeping casualties low was important as there was no life insurance and the loss of a bread winner was devastating to a family. In fact it was not allowed for a father and son to both belong to the society.[41] After one battle with the Japanese so many Red Spears died that almost every family lost a member, and in response the chapter was shut down by an angry mob.[42] The majority of the intelligence possessed by the Red Spears was of the operational and tactical level. Like bandits, and

many Chinese Communist Party cells, the Red Spear members themselves did not have to come into contact with bandits and soldiers to learn about them. As long as the bandits or soldiers had some form of contact with the rural population the Red Spears would learn of the marauders. The Red Spears' intelligence also came from direct contact with enemy, reconnaissance, and interrogation of prisoners. Other sources of intelligence such as radio transmissions and radar were of no use to either side; while common in the West these were nonexistent in China. The Japanese, however, had limited access to photo reconnaissance, but this sort of intelligence had a very short life span and required immediate action before it became obsolete.[43] Considering the difficulty many military units faced in mobilizing, a quick and timely response was unlikely.

The Red Spears quickly wiped out warlord and Japanese units when they were isolated, outnumbered, and beyond immediate reinforcement.[44] The Red Spears' knowledge of the land and the enemy's position helped them pick the ideal time and place for the attack. The Red Spears presented another case where regular armies fought irregulars, only to find that the familiarity of the inhabitants with their country and widespread peasant support, when combined with the invader's relative clumsiness, more than made up for the former's inferiority in weapons.[45] This was certainly the case in China during the first half of the twentieth century.

The Red Spear's intelligence monopoly meant that they knew their opponents' locations and numbers at all times.[46] The soldiers and bandits lived off the localities they

were in. This helped give the Red Spears a good idea when their opponents were reaching the end of their supply lines and endurance. It in turn allowed the Red Spears to wait until the soldiers were at the end of their rope, far from home and re-supply, before they mobilized to attack. Fatigue, exertion, and privation constitute in war a special principle of destruction which is inseparably bound to battle.[47] Small groups of soldiers and bandits could be quickly and easily outnumbered and the fact that the Red Spears knew of this vulnerability meant that they often were.

In the January of 1926 the Red Spears defeated two hundred thousand of Yue's troops in ten days by falling on the troops as they retreated from Wu Peifu. The Red Spears not only knew the route of retreat but capitalized on that information by concentrating the necessary number of Red Spears at the best ambush points along that route.[48] The effectiveness of the Red Spears was pointed out by J. W. Stilwell, a military advisor in China in 1927. He reported that the Red Spear Society was killing all small parties of soldiers they could handle to the point that the Northern armies feared them more than they feared their Southern opponents.[49]

Knowledge of the enemy's position and disposition meant that the Red Spears could then choose the most advantageous place and time for an attack before their enemy entered their home areas. We have already discussed how they could mobilize quickly at these points, but first of course they determined where these places were. No battle can take place but by mutual consent, and the Red Spears were generally unwilling to consent unless odds were in their favor. The Red Spears knew when their opponents were beyond

immediate reinforcement and resupply. They also knew how the bandits and soldiers had entered their county and thus which way they were likely to retreat in. The Red Spears could then block these avenues of retreat, forming up from the countryside all around their opponent and decimating them.

Battle by consent could work in two ways; if outnumbered and outmaneuvered badly enough, bandits and the Chinese armies were likely to surrender. The Japanese soldiers were an exception in that they generally fought to the last man regardless of the odds. There are no recorded cases of Japanese units negotiating with the Red Spears, just massive losses on both sides.[50] In either case this could lead to stunning victories. In April 1927 the Eighth Army of the Fengtian forces began to run riot over Luoshan county in Henan, and was subsequently completely wiped out by the Red Spears.[51] On another occasion American attachés reported that on June 17, 1939, one thousand Japanese soldiers were wiped out by irregulars at Changzhou, Jiangsu.[52] On yet another occasion an entire Japanese encampment in Heilongjiang's Wanqiu county was annihilated and over a thousand Japanese troops were killed. The Red Spears themselves lost three thousand men in the attack.[53]

An excellent of example intelligence application took place in 1938 when Japanese troops were attacked on the Tangying Xun Highway in northern China by Red Spears units. Several hundred Japanese were killed or wounded, and many weapons were captured by the Red Spears. In fact the Japanese often suffered heavy losses from Red

Spear attacks.[54] On this occasion the Red Spears' intelligence monopoly allowed them to attack the Japanese while they were marching. Since they were traveling the Japanese would not have been able to employ artillery as it needed to be set up. The Japanese soldiers were stretched out down the road in a long column, so that the Red Spears had to face only a small portion of the Japanese force. If the Japanese troops held their ground they would be wiped out. If Japanese troops fell back they would head towards safety, which meant moving back up their own lines the way they came. This in turn mean that reinforcements were unable to reach the battle. If the battle site was chosen carefully the Japanese would also be unable to employ their machine guns to full effect, which in turn helped lessen the disparity in arms.

One reason why the Red Spears were able to utilize intelligence to outmaneuver their opponents was their opponents' lack of intelligence. Bandits would often be raiding from other districts, and government and Japanese soldiers were unfamiliar with the area in which they operated. Combined with the dislike of the common people, they were left almost completely blind.[55] Operational intelligence is generally gathered by direct contact, reconnaissance, or interrogation of prisoners. While it was possible that some information could be gathered by soldiers and bandits through interrogation, such as the identity of leaders, it was never enough to ensure long lasting victory. Interrogation itself was likely to fail as all Red Spear members took a pledge to secrecy.[56] At the same time reconnaissance and direct contact were not feasible, for if the soldiers or bandits made contact with the Red Spears they were normally outnumbered, and in a bad position and

about to be defeated. While the Japanese had aerial reconnaissance the inability of the Japanese army to mobilize fast enough and the Red Spears' own mobility made this source difficult to use effectively.

Even knowledge of the local landscape gave the Red Spears an unmistakable advantage, as the most basic information was unavailable to Chinese military officers. Their maps were not particularly suited to military use and they failed to show elevation and often lacked any sort of scale. No relief, no roads, or other features were marked; instead all they had were straight lines between large population points indicating telegraph lines.[57] The only option most government and Japanese military units had was to try and find local guides. The guides could be uncooperative, but worse yet might even be Red Spear members leading them into an ambush. At the same time there was no way to evaluate the strength or arms of the Red Spears in the area. The officers were like ship captains in a heavy fog. A Russian advisor with the Nationalist army wrote about this problem of leaving the rail lines and moving into the country "... frightening to find oneself in completely unknown surroundings."[58]

The Red Spear intelligence monopoly was so well developed that Japanese units feared to leave the rail lines. Whenever small Japanese units left the rail lines, whether to repair telegraph lines or do reconnaissance, they were likely to be attacked, their bodies found later, lying along the roadside.[59] American attaches also noted that both the cooperation of the peasantry and knowledge of the terrain allowed the Red Spears to

attack and disappear with disconcerting regularity and ease. Foreign observers who accompanied the Japanese "flying columns" sent to suppress resistance reported them to be almost paralyzed with nervousness.[60] These flying columns had at least one hundred seventy-five Japanese troops and some four hundred Manzhouguo troops, and they would go to specified towns and villages.[61] The units were large enough to be quickly found by the Red Spears and not large enough to withstand a Red Spear attack. On July 12, 1938 a group of Japanese soldiers were ambushed by sixteen Red Spears, who through a well executed attack managed to kill eighty Japanese infantrymen.[62]

The Japanese attempted to correct the intelligence situation. After the Manchurian incident in September 1931 an analysis of the structure of rural villages in Manchuria was undertaken on the Army's behalf by the South Manchurian Railway. A study of customs in North China villages and an investigation of commercial practices was also prepared.[63] Based on this information the Japanese army hoped that when it carried out village round ups it would have a better chance of separating the guerrillas from the regular farmers.[64] This information was unable to prepare Japanese units for the strength and speed of Red Spear attacks.

The Red Spear's operational intelligence combined with their organizational flexibility were major factors in their success. If it were not for the Red Spears' organizational fluidity they could not have made use of their intelligence before it became obsolete. At the same time if it were not for the Red Spears' intelligence monopoly their organizational flexibility would have been of only limited use. The Red Spears' constant

knowledge of the enemy's position and disposition meant that they could swiftly bring together numerical superiority where the enemy was vulnerable. This helps to explain why the vast majority of reports dealing with Red Spears have them attacking soldiers instead of finding a defensive position and trying to hold it. It also helps to explain further how the Red Spears could have ended the majority of banditry in their areas and pose a threat to warlord, Nationalist, and Japanese armies. Still these skills only helped them to get to the battlefield with the cards stacked in their favor; they did not assure victory. They were after all a force of peasants armed with spears fighting opponents armed with rifles. Since the Red Spears were not truly bullet proof they still needed a way to achieve victory in the face of seemingly superior firepower on the battlefield itself.

The Red Spears were a popular defense option because of their ability to protect villages while minimizing casualties. Minimizing casualties, however, was not as difficult as one might at first think. In most cases the disparity in arms was not as great as most scholars assume. Even the common and basic idea that industrial weapons have increased causalities is not helpful. There is little evidence to suggest that casualties proportional to the number of soldiers engaged have been much influenced by technological change.[65] Even where one combatant has seemingly superior arms, as in the case of the Japanese army versus the Red Spears, the degree of technological impact is still difficult to define.[66] It did not necessarily matter how much firepower a military unit had; how they applied firepower mattered.

First off, both the Red Spears and their opponents made extensive and rarely exclusive use of melee weapons. The Red Spears, of course, got their name from their own primary weapon, a seven foot long red tasseled spear. The Red Spears were also known to use swords and were considered very skillful in the use of both spear and sword.[67] In many cases even the soldiers of some warlords whom Red Spears fought were equipped with spears and swords. In fact, many Chinese units, Red Spear, bandit, and warlord, did not have enough rifles to go around, and in certain areas the scarcity of rifles resulted in entire units being armed with spears.[68] One American observer rode on a train carrying newly made spears with seven foot long wooden handles and steel heads, all of which were destined for troops under Wu Peifu's command.[69] Feng Yuxiang's most famous and feared troops were his Big Sword men, who trained in martial arts and were equipped with large swords and revolvers. Most of the station and railway guards in Feng's areas were equipped with revolver and sword, or just a sword.[70]

The Red Spears' most common adversary, the bandit, relied on melee weapons even more heavily than government soldiers relied on melee weapons. Western travelers wrote often of the groups of hungry bandits armed with only pikes and spears.[71] Even the Japanese troops whom the Red Spears fought were taught that the bayonet or sword were their primary weapons. The Japanese infantryman's training included many hours of bayonet fighting, not terribly different from the hours of martial arts training most warlord soldiers received.[72] The general issue bayonet was about fifteen and a half inches long, but even when attached to a rifle it was still about a foot shorter than the spears used by the

Red Spears. As a result the Red Spear member was actually better armed for melee combat. The use of melee weapons depended a great deal on strength and training. The many hours that Red Spear members spent training with their weapons meant that while their weapons may not have been much more lethal than their opponent's melee weapons, the Red Spearman as a combatant was much more lethal.

The reason that the Red Spears had to be sure about outnumbering their opponents was the presence of small arms. Small arms were the most common weapons used in China at the time. The Red Spears faced both rifles and pistols when they attacked the bandits and soldiers. This, however, did not tip the scales so far out of the Red Spears' favour to make victory impossible. Even Nationalist military units, let alone the bandits, had a hard time obtaining enough ammunition. This was good for the Red Spears as it meant that most men received little or no training with live ammunition before they found themselves in combat. In fact target practice for infantry was almost entirely neglected within Chinese armies.[73] This gave the soldiers few chances to develop much in the way of marksmanship, and greatly restricted the range at which their weapons were likely to be effective. The Chinese soldier also tended to be a poor marksman because he did not give much attention to the care and cleaning of his weapons. While the Chinese troops, Japanese infantry, and bandits were all armed with very similar rifles there was no uniform specifications or quality for three reasons. First most Chinese arsenals were purely regional, the foreign supply came from many different countries, and finally the

procurement was the individual problem of each militarist.[74] All of this meant that firearms were far less lethal in combat than one might otherwise expect.

Of the several different arms, the 6.8, 7.9, and 6.5 masseur rifles and the Meiji 38 were the most common. The Meiji 38 was really just a copy of the 1898 Mauser and none of the previously mentioned rifles were sighted for more than 1400 meters.[75] This distance however was the maximum range and most soldiers could not be expected to hit a target at much more than half that range in battle field conditions. Simple things like a cross breeze could make it impossible to hit a target at long range, and even setting the back site to hit targets at different ranges was more than most soldiers were capable of. Even Japanese troops had their back sites calibrated at 100m stages back to 400m, which were generally accurate only up to 400 meters.[76] While too much is often made of the poor marksmanship of the bandits and government soldiers, it was still a factor in Red Spear victories. Certainly there were bandits and soldiers who were good shots. Sutton describes helping defend one town, manning the barricade with the town militia, where the bandits had several good shots in their group and were able to shot many of the militiamen manning the walls.[77] The bandits and soldiers' poor marksmanship is important because it meant that the difference between them and the Red Spear riflemen was small. It was not just the fact that the soldiers could not hit the Red Spears, but the Red Spears had a comparable chance of hitting the soldiers and bandits back.

We do know that while the Red Spears went into battle armed with everything from spears to farming implements, they also used guns when available.[78] There are

reports of Red Spear chapters of even having a handful of machine guns and about one rifle for every three members.[79] The Chinese Communist Party believed that the Red Spears of Xuchang county in Henan had about ten thousand rifles amongst its forty thousand members.[80] Of course every time the Red Spears defeated a group of soldiers or bandits the ratio of guns to men in the movement improved because of captured equipment.[81] Over time the number of Red Spear members using firearms steadily increased; on rare occasions firearms even became the most common weapon in a unit.[82] In fact many gentry members had been buying modern arms and then hiring local people to hide machine guns and cannon just in case their towns were threatened.[83] The Japanese estimated that each county had at least a thousand rifles with which the peasants equipped themselves.[84]

The greatest limiting factor on the lethality of firearms was ammunition. The Red Spears developed a system of combat reliant on melee weapons and so were not limited by ammunition supply. Their opponents, however, were often very dependent on the supply of ammunition available. In fact a soldier or bandit's ability to stay on the battlefield and fight depended to a very great degree on how much ammunition he had available. The amount of ammunition expended in even a short battle could be staggering. Because of the chaotic supply situation of most Chinese military units it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty how many rounds of ammunition a unit would expend in a few minutes of combat. Since the most of the Red Spear attacks were victorious it is even harder to

say how many rounds were expended against the Red Spears in a battle.

Red Spear chapters attacking Japanese units could expect to suffer roughly one casualty for every thirty or so rounds fired by the Japanese if the soldiers were equipped with light machine guns.[85] If the Red Spears attacked with a ratio of better than three to one, or in circumstances which denied the Japanese soldiers clear fields of fire the Japanese unit would quickly find itself having no choice but to rely on its bayonets. At the very least this illustrates the massive volume of ammunition needed for small arms to be successfully employed on the battlefield. In fact one reason the British suffered such a staggering defeat at Isandalwana is that the men firing in the lines ran out of ammunition. It was not unusual to find the majority of wounds inflicted in a battle between warlord forces to come from bayonets because of ammunition shortages.[86]

The rifles gave their soldier and bandit owners an advantage for the first few minutes of a battle, after which the soldier or bandit had decided whether or not he cared enough about the battle to use his bayonet. Most men carried no more than sixty rounds on their person, which in the heat of battle, were expended within minutes. The Japanese infantry man was in slightly better shape. First off the Japanese army as a whole never experienced a shortage of ammunition. Japan did, however, have to take eight million one cent pieces out of circulation in 1940 to make sure they had enough copper for casings.[87] The infantry man himself had at the most one hundred twenty rounds of ammunition. It was carried in three belt pouches, two thirty round pouches, one on either side of the belt buckle, and a sixty round pouch at the back. This much ammunition made some

maneuvers such as crawling very difficult.[88] While one hundred and twenty rounds may sound like a lot, it was really only enough to engage in skirmishes and not pitched battles. The Red Spears were also more mobile and effective in melee combat than the Japanese soldier because the Red Spears did not carry the extra weight.

It would, however, be wrong to underestimate the lethality of small arms. The Red Spears still had to use their superior intelligence and mobility to shield themselves from rifle fire. The disparity in weapons may not have been so great to make victory impossible, but the Red Spears had to defeat their opponents while keeping their own losses to the barest minimum. Mission hospitals in China reported that the majority of victims of bandit attacks had to be treated for gunshot wounds.[89] This may partly have to do with the fact that cuts and slashes, as inflicted by swords, were easier to deal with by Chinese doctors and peasants and thus not brought in, while gunshots often produced much more complicated wounds that required western medicine.[90] It was a superior volume of accurate fire on the battlefield which would carry the day, and not just superior technology.[91] Rifles have been more deadly than machine guns. The real killer in the First World War after artillery was the sniper, causing more casualties overall than seemingly more formidable armaments.[92] When Frank One-Arm-Sutton was attacked by bandits he managed to put them to flight by using a hunting rifle with a telescopic-sight and an assistant with binoculars to spot for him. Sutton sniped enough of the bandits from well beyond the range of their own rifles that they decided that the town was not worth the

cost.[93]

One of the biggest differences between the Red Spears and their opponents was in machine guns. The Red Spears not only had few machine-guns themselves, but also had to do their best to minimize their exposure to machine-gun fire. More than a rifle, it took training to both fire and effectively employ a machine gun on the battlefield. The Chinese and Japanese government soldiers had access to and made use of machine guns whenever possible. The chatter of machine-guns and men spilling out of trenches into a hail of bullets and certain death is an image taught to most western school children. Unfortunately it fails to represent both the most effective employment of machine guns and their real lethality. The machine-gun is a surprisingly misunderstood weapon.[94] In reality it is quite limited. During the First World War, where most of our images of machine-guns in combat come from, the vast majority, about sixty percent, of all the casualties came from artillery.[95] China was a very different situation however, with much lower troops concentrations, and when fighting irregulars, there was less chance to bring artillery into action. Many military hospitals in China reported that small arms and bayonets, not artillery, produced the majority of wounds.[96] At the same time the machine-gun, to be effective, was best employed in numbers with supporting fields of fire. Enfilading fire, or fire on a formations flank, could be brought to bear upon a target from several different directions and create an impenetrable killing zone. If the field of fire could be restricted, however, the damage a machine gun could cause was drastically reduced.

The Red Spears suffered the majority of their defeats at the hands of the Japanese. This is in part due to the increased disparity in arms caused by Japanese machine-guns. In combat, Japanese infantry platoons were normally divided into six groups, with eight men; three of these groups had light machine guns (LMG).[97] The standard LMG throughout this period was the Type 96 6.5mm Nambu, which has been credited with causing more Allied casualties in the South West Pacific and Burma than any other Japanese weapon.[98] So for every platoon, or forty-eight men the Red Spears confronted, they could expect to face three LMG, or roughly one LMG for every sixteen Japanese soldiers. This made it all the more essential for the Red Spears to choose the right battlefield and minimize the chance of exposure to enfilading fire. This does help account for how Red Spear casualty reports were highest from attacks on the Japanese.

The most powerful weapon which soldiers had to turn on the Red Spears was artillery. Yet artillery posed very little threat to the Red Spears and was easily avoided. The Red Spears attacked quickly enough that the artillery could not be unlimbered and brought to bear on them. The Red Spears also avoided fighting in static positions where their opponents would have time to unlimber their guns, fire test shells to gauge the range, and then employ a bombardment which would cut them to pieces. The Chinese soldiers tended to be poorly trained, both in the application of artillery and aiming it. Even staff officers in Chinese armies failed to understand the necessity of heavy guns for bombarding a strongly held position, let alone fortification.[99]

If the Red Spears' own skill was unable to save them from artillery, the gunners'lack of skill did. The Fengtian artillery, for instance, would use high explosive shells against infantry advancing in open order (spread out) instead of shrapnel shells. Shrapnel shells were designed to be used on infantry by scattering small pieces of metal over a large area at high speed. At the same time they wasted thousands of rounds of ammunition by using shrapnel when shelling villages, where the troops in the village could find ample cover behind walls and in buildings. The gunners also obtained their ranges from unreliable maps and did not use a signaling system and forward observers to correct their aim. While the gunners could correct the time on the shells' fuses to account for range they failed to adjust the fuse to account for trajectory, and so most shells burst too high to be effective.[100] Thus we observe that artillery, even when used, was unlikely to ensure victory against the Red Spears, as seen in the events of the spring of 1927 when the Red Spears fought in several counties against the troops of the warlord Wei Aisan in southern Henan. While the soldiers utilized field artillery and several thousand men per side took part, the army was still defeated.[101]

The only other weapon the Red Spears had to deal with was the mortar. Yet while potentially deadly it accounts for surprisingly few casualties. The mortar is a metal tube which fired a specialized projectile, very much like a grenade. The projectile was fired on a step trajectory, putting artillery in the hands of the common infantryman. It takes time to sight it up, and since the Red Spears would generally close within a matter of minutes, the employment of mortars to full effect was difficult. At the same time the mortar was

designed to be able to be brought into action quickly. The weight of the ammunition and transport difficulties in China greatly limited how many shots the soldiers would have. The warlord Zhang Zuolin equipped his forces with trench mortars, as did the Japanese.

As can be seen the disparity in arms was smaller than one might have expected, and as such helped contribute to the Red Spears' effectiveness as a mode of defense. The difference in arms between a Red Spear chapter and bandits or many Chinese military units was minute. Between this and the ability of the Red Spear organization and intelligence to allow for superior numbers at key locations, it becomes easier to understand how the Red Spears could be effective. Yet the Red Spears had to not only win, but they had to win while avoiding casualties. They had to be able to beat their opponents without taking excessive losses. If casualties were too high people would have stopped believing the Red Spears' claims of invulnerability, and possibly stop supporting the movement. They had to ensure a reasonable chance of survival. By examining the performance of Red Spears and their weaponry at the tactical level it is possible to gain some understanding how this was possible. After all superior intelligence, numbers, and lessening the technology gap are only contributing factors to the battle, and it was in battle itself where the Red Spear Society met its final test.

The Red Spears' chief obstacle on the battlefield was summed up well by Liddell Hart when he wrote "For so long as a bare couple of yards separates men the bullet can outreach the bayonet."[102] Thus the Red Spears would have had to pick terrain which

would provide them with cover and limit their opponent's field of fire. Most importantly they had to avoid a situation where they would be subjected to enfilading fire. This basically means any situation where their opponents could direct fire on their front and across their flanks. Enfielding fire would maximize their opponents' arms advantage while exposing a large percentage of the Red Spears. If the terrain made the setting up of machine guns on the flank impossible, and thus removing enfilading fire, the Red Spears would be in practical terms increasing their numerical advantage.

Thus it was the employment of force that was most important. The teachings of the Red Spears included more than just magic and martial arts, but also tactical battlefield skills. While not deserters many of the officers in the Red Spears were men of some military experience.[103] Thus they would have had some understanding of how firearms were employed on the battlefield and how to avoid exposing themselves unnecessarily to gun fire. Certainly the sites they chose for attack, through gaoliang fields, graveyards, and up rocky slopes, all provide excellent cover and made it easier for them to avoid enfilading fire. If a group of bandits had twice as many guns as the local Red Spears it was only important so long as the bandits could get them all firing at the Red Spears at once. Cover was also important. A group of bandits could have three times as many guns as a group of Red Spears, but if the Red Spears had cover and caught the bandits in the open the few guns possessed by the Red Spears could be far more lethal than all the bandits' rifles together. In fact the Red Spear's use of his weapon is complementary, and not superior to, the use he makes of tactics and the ground in approaching his opponent.[104]

Most valuable was rough, hilly, or wooded country, where the only form of advance was on foot in open order.[105] Even during the advance the Red Spears had to ensure they spent as little time as possible exposed to enemy fire. Knowledge of ground and cover was an effective way to equip the men with a shield against the enemy's fire.[106] Certainly from the descriptions of battles that the Red Spears fought we know that they utilized cover in the advance. This also indicates that more than just magic and martial arts was taught in the Red Schools. The same advantages used by bandits would also aid the Red Spears. For instance between mid-June to mid-August the gaoliang was so tall and thick that it provided excellent cover for a man on horseback.[107] Thus the Red Spears could advance almost on top of their opponent before they would be fired upon. The use of crops for cover was so important that the harvesting of crops could bring most Red Spear activity to a halt.[108]

The Red Spears would also have some tactical advantages owing to their weaponry and training. Light infantry demands light weapons. It is important that they be able to move over rough and hilly ground with cat-like agility, cover open patches with quick sprints, and creep and crawl over long distances.[109] Physical training would go a long way to making this possible, and many of the Red Spear martial arts involved breathing exercises that increased their stamina and lung capacity. At the same time light equipment was also important. American soldiers in Vietnam discovered how difficult it was to outmaneuver an opponent on the battlefield when the latter had only the weight of

his weapon and the American soldier carried a full pack.

The Japanese soldiers, even without their rifle and full pack, carried five kilograms into battle. The rifle without bayonet weighed an additional four kilograms.[110] An extra twenty pounds could begin to feel like a hundred after a few minutes of intense physical activity, not to mention the bulk of their ammunition belts making crawling and utilizing minimal cover difficult. This in turn would leave them exposed to the few rifles that the Red Spears had, while allowing the Red Spears to utilize cover more effectively. More importantly, since the Red Spears carried a fraction of the weight that their opponents often carried, if their opponent expected to run away he would require some sort of head start.

The tactics employed by both bandits and Chinese soldiers only made the Red Spears' job easier. The method usually employed was a direct frontal attack; ultimate victory depended primarily upon fire action and thus indirectly on ammunition supply. The coordinate employment of infantry weapons, such as indirect and flanking fire by machine-guns and the use of trench mortars to paralyze centers of resistance, was practically unknown. Most often the bandit or government soldier would simply lie behind cover, shoot once in a while, and wait until their enemy runs out of ammunition and flees. This did not normally take long. Even Nationalist troops carried only about fifty rounds a man per battle and most warlord soldiers had only a fraction of that.[111] Considering that the Red Spears insisted on running towards them instead of running away, things would likely go badly for the soldiers.

In one battle the Red Spears attacked government troops who were arrayed at the top of a mountaintop. While many Red Spears were killed they continued to advance. The mountainous terrain gave the Red Spears good cover as they advanced towards the soldiers. The Red Spears won by forcing soldiers to retreat after they expended all their ammunition.[112]

The Japanese infantry could conduct a rapid advance while utilizing cover at the rate of one hundred yards in two minutes.[113] Considering that the Red Spears carried a great deal less weight, they were capable of advancing at least as quickly. Unlikely to stop and fire while advancing, they may have been able to advance even faster. Most Chinese soldiers and bandits were hard pressed to hit an opponent at any range greater than 400 meters. While Japanese troops carried ninety rounds a man, Nationalist troops carried no more than fifty, and most warlord troops carried only a fraction of that to stop a Red Spear attack before it came too close. The Red Spears at full advance could cover 400 meters within less than eight minutes. Those armed with spears or swords might just give up when outnumbered and seeing no hope in winning. If they were going to start running, the most dangerous act in warfare, they would have to make a decision before the Red Spears got within at least one hundred meters, if not two hundred.[114] They would have only about four minutes to halt the advancing Red Spears.

The Red Spears often outnumbered the soldiers and bandits by as much as ten to one, and the Red Spears did not retreat easily. Each soldier would have to hit a Red Spear

once every thirty seconds or so. Considering that the Red Spears often had good cover and the soldiers only a handful of rounds, it was unlikely that they could pull this off. Thus it is not surprising the soldiers and bandits would turn and run. If they did turn to run they would likely find that the Red Spears had them surrounded, which then helps account for the number of soldiers the Red Spears managed to slaughter.

This of course raises another important question. If victory depended on the ability of the Red Spears to attack, and not like most bandits or soldiers who fall back under fire, where did the difference come from? At the same time why was it that soldiers, with at least a marginal advantage in fire power, would route? Certainly there were times when retreat was an intelligent and reasonable behavior, at others it simply seemed to be cowardice. The Japanese soldier was unlikely to flee, and so the Red Spears would have to engage in melee to achieve victory. Why were the Red Spears willing to do that? Inevitably, no matter how well prepared the Red Spears were, or how well they conducted a battle, there would be casualties. To be effective as an organization the Red Spear Society had to be able to lose the occasional battle and yet continue to provide protection in the future. Knowing this is the key to understanding why peasants would continue to support the movement even after it had suffered a defeat.

Red Spear chapters were organized in such a way that there was no single leader or committee whose removal would end the movement. Not only that, but their organization was cellular. While there were pseudo-kinship ties between members of the society there was no essential organizational system linking one town to the next. As a

result, if one town were wiped out and all the Red Spears from that village killed, it would make little difference in the group's ability to muster and drive the bandits or soldiers from the county. When soldiers or bandits took a town, the Red Spears would be able to mobilize from all the other towns in the area. Even if the Red Spears from the occupied town stayed hidden, the Red Spears could still mobilize the necessary number to deal with the invading force. A tradition of government suppression of secret societies may have made this sort of organization more likely, but it also could have been a byproduct from earlier forms of militia. Either way the result was that even if bandits or soldiers were able to defeat a Red Spear army it did not necessarily mean the end of the movement. In this way the Red Spear Society had an impressive ability to sustain damage and continue to operate, which is an important factor in a military organization's ability to achieve victory.

The Red Spears were also difficult to defeat because of their ability to mobilize as soon as troop concentrations dropped low enough to make it safe to do so. The Red Spear members were able, like anybody else, to estimate their chances of success and survival and weigh this against what they thought they had to lose. Thus they would only mobilize when they seemed to have a reasonable chance of success. This means that if enough soldiers were posted in a district, regardless of the soldiers' behavior, the Red Spears were unlikely to act. They would only strike when they had numerical superiority and before the soldiers or bandits settled in. For instance in Henan the Red Spears

defeated the Nationalist Army troops in the region and assumed control of the town of Luoyang for several days. When Wu Peifu moved in to the province he ordered his officers to blot out the Red Spears. Wu however had two problems. Initially the Red Spears simply demobilized and disappeared. We know that they had been mobilized for almost three weeks at this point, and so the Red Spears were going to have to demobilize soon in any case because of supply problems. Also Wu initially moved enough troops into the area to remove a reasonable chance of Red Spear success, and so the Red Spears demobilized. As a result Wu not only failed to force a battle, but because of military necessity he could not afford to leave large numbers of troops in Henan. Yet as he moved troops out, the Red Spears once again mobilized and began cutting his soldiers off from the countryside. The damage this did to Wu's supply situation, and the number of troops it drained from his combat force, certainly affected the rest of his campaign.

The Red Spears, while being defeated by the Japanese army several times, continued to operate throughout the war of resistance. In fact the Japanese even found it necessary in their own rear areas to supply foreigners with escorts of more than one hundred ten men to protect against possible attacks.[115] In many cases the Red Spears took the lead and attacked Japanese local garrisons and troops on the move.[116] This is indicated by the fact that many of the attacks on Japanese soldiers had no prospect of loot or supplies, and so were unlikely carried out by Red Army guerrillas.[117]

The Red Spears' strong defensive capability is demonstrated by the Japanese army's inability to destroy the movement despite its best efforts. As the Japanese became

the main opponent many Red Spear Societies changed their name to either the "Loyal Salvation Army" or "Brave Volunteer Army," the latter of which the Japanese estimated numbering around four thousand members.[118] Two of the areas in which the Japanese seemed to have the most trouble with irregulars were in Shanxi and Henan, where the irregulars achieved many local successes.[119] In 1938 the Japanese announced that in the four-month period in July-October they had fought one thousand six hundred eighty engagements along the Pinghan and Chengtai railways.[120]

The Japanese proved to be incapable of wiping out irregular and sectarian resistance. The Japanese forces were constantly constrained to conduct sweeping clean-up campaigns, all in areas which they had previously cleared.[121] The smallest units assigned to garrison or pacification duties were independent mixed brigades. They were predominantly a rifle force composed usually of between three and six infantry battalions seven hundred fifty to nine hundred strong, along with small artillery, engineer, and signals units. Battalions had three to four rifle companies and their strength varied accordingly.[122] With the clear reports of Red Spears coming into conflict with Japanese soldiers we can observe two things. Firstly, the Red Spears were just as active in fighting the Japanese as they had been against bandits and Chinese soldiers. Secondly, the Japanese army while being more systematic had no better solution than the Chinese military men for dealing with the Red Spears and other sectarian militia.

The extent and failure of the Japanese programs to end Red Spear and other

similar activities demonstrate the staying power of the Red Spear Society. The Japanese officers were given very detailed instructions on how they were supposed to put an end to militia activities. They were instructed to surround and take the whole town by surprise, put the women and children in one group and the men in another. They then asked the groups for any weapons present in the town, and told them that if they were not produced the headman would be killed. If the men resisted they were put in the town prison and exposed to a type of red candle which induced sneezing. Meanwhile the women were told that if they turned over the arms their men would be spared.

The Japanese officers were also instructed by manuals that threatening to burn the village may be necessary. If it was necessary to burn the village it was to be done one building at a time, making sure nobody was inside. Another method used by the Japanese army for discovering arms was to gather all the people into one building, a guild hall or temple. Then they took all their livestock, put up camp where they could be seen and then began killing the livestock one animal per day. The Japanese officers were reminded that if the weather was warm, water would have to provided every other day or the old and very young people would begin to die. It was also suggested by the manuals that all the village boys between 14 and 15 be taken to the place where the troublemakers had been killed, shown the corpses, and told that the same could happen to them. It was believed that the boys were old enough to know the village but young enough to be easily coerced. All of this was done to avoid having the soldiers look for the weapons themselves, as they were unlikely to find very many and would end up looking foolish. The smallest force to

be sent on such an operation was a company, being at least 20 men and armed with at least one machine-gun.[123] Yet even if this was a success and a village was pacified, it was only a short term and local solution. The Red Spear's method of organization meant that the disarmament of one town did little to reduce the Red Spears' effectiveness as a whole. In time even the disarmed town, unless garrisoned, would rearm as well.

The Red Spear Society's method of organization was well suited to meeting the goals of the society. This study has shown that to be successful the Red Spear Society had to be able to mobilize superior numbers at the crucial point in order to achieve a decisive victory. The cellular organization was ideal for this. When combined with the enemies' inability to move quickly it allowed the Red Spears to mobilize fast enough and with enough men to achieve decisive victory. At the same time it also allowed the Red Spears to demobilize before reinforcements arrived and forced the Red Spears into battle on unfavorable terms. The Red Spears' cellular structure and lack of central leadership were also important as they could take a significant number of losses, losing whole chapters or towns without really reducing their ability to protect the towns in which they continued to operate. Since Red Spear Society members when demobilized were inseparable from the rest of the population it was almost impossible to defeat them. In this way the Red Spears were able to fight only those battles which they thought they had a reasonable chance of success. The Red Spears' ability to minimize the disparity in arms was key to their defeating their opponents and defending their homes and families. Their intelligence monopoly was critical, and equally critical was their organization which

allowed them to act on that intelligence. On the field itself their utilization of favorable terrain allowed them to close with their enemies and defeat them. This study has shown how it was possible for the Red Spears to be successful, and while this success was a key factor in the Red Spear Society's popularity it also contributed to the group's eventual disappearance.

CHAPTER 4. Conclusion: The Disappearance of the Red Spears.

While successfully defending thousands of Chinese villages for over twenty years the Red Spear Society slowly faded away and disappeared as the war with Japan came to a close and the war between the Communists and Nationalists started up. A combination of factors worked together to bring an end to what was once a powerful and popular peasant organization. The ability of the Red Spear Society to successfully defend villages was weakened by Japanese mechanization and use of armor. The Nationalists converted some Red Spear chapters into part of their regular militia. Aside from providing funds and government legitimacy this did not alter the Red Spear Society's basic character. After the Japanese invaded and the Nationalists lost control of the countryside the Red Spears emerged once more. Other Red Spear units became co-opted into the Red Army. The need for the Red Spear Societies also slowly faded away.

As the warlords whose constant fighting had led to the Red Spears' inception ceased to exist so did the Red Spears. It was the military defeat of the warlords and not the Red Spears themselves which brought the movement to an end. The Red Spear Society did not have a cohesive ideology of revolution. Their only purpose was defense. Unlike the Boxers who also came out of Shandong, and to whom they were related, the Red Spears did not roam, but remained static, firmly tethered to the villages from which

they came. The ability to one degree or another of Japanese, Chinese Communist Party, and Nationalist government to provide security to the peasants in the areas they controlled meant the Red Spear Society was no longer needed.

This is not, however, to say that the Red Spears no longer had an impact on events in China. Red Spear teachings and practices had a common origin with, and influence on, how the Red Army fought and how Mao Zedong developed his military doctrine. There are striking similarities between Mao's own military teachings and the practices of Red Spear Society. Both the techniques of the Red Spears and Mao's teaching built upon a long tradition of peasant resistance in China. Understanding how the Red Spears operated is important because the same methodologies and skills which allowed the Red Spears to be successful also contributed to the success of the Red Army. The Red Army did not begin to be successful until after 1927, by which time Red Spears had already fought most of their major battles. It seems likely that the Red Army, and Mao in particular, learned a great deal from observing and co-opting the Red Spear Society.

Throughout the 1930s the Chinese Communist Party put a great deal of effort into co-opting the Red Spear Society into their own movement.[1] If the Chinese Communist Party could manage to politicize the Red Spears and replace mysticism with revolutionary fervor these groups were ideally suited to the Chinese Communist Party's war effort. Yet while the Red Spears had around three million members, the Chinese Communist Party had only thirty-five or so representatives working with no more than fifty thousand Red Spears in the early 1930s.[2] In fact, many of the partisan groups operating under Chinese

Communist Party direction were not part of the regular Red Army, but corresponded more closely to militias, if not actual co-opted militias.[3] There were reports of the Manchurian Red Spears joining the Red Army, but they did not necessarily become communists.[4]

In the Red Spears the Red Army found a rural movement with existing combat organization and experience, as well as many of the same operational and tactical ideals. The Red Army emphasized outnumbering and then closing with their opponents. On March 23, 1938, for instance the 115th Division of the Red Army used hand-grenades, automatics, and then bayonets and knives to wipe out thousands of Japanese soldiers while they were marching down the road.[5] The Red Army units were to lead the enemy troops into terrain favourable to the guerrillas, and then outmaneuver them and fall on their flank and rear. When the enemy forces were strong the guerrilla units were to avoid them by falling apart, and then come together later when the enemy weakened. Permanent defenses were not to be attacked or held.[6] The similarities between the Red Army and the Red Spears are striking, for they not only had the similar problems to overcome, but they overcame them in the same way. Even the Red Army's manual of tactics reads like a description of Red Spear methods suggesting both common origin and influence.

The similarities between the Red Spears and the Chinese Communist Party in terms of military thinking and behavior were numerous. The Red Army developed its own methodologies by observing how the sectarian militias, as well as bandits, operated. The

Red Spears likely had more impact on the Red Army than bandits as many Red Spear chapters joined the Red Army and the bandits were accepted only slowly. Surprisingly, the similarities between the Red Army and the Red Spears is rarely looked at in modern scholarship. This is unfortunate for two reasons: it helps create the myth that Mao invented guerrilla warfare, and more importantly it obscures the Red Spears' final years from the historian's view. Mark Seldon, however, in his article series on guerrilla warfare in China does note that the Chinese Communist Party's tactics were likely influenced by the ready example of bandits and sectarian militias.[7] On the other hand he does not attempt to see exactly what those influences were or emphasize just how large they were.

Mao himself, however, came to regard the secret societies after 1949 as reactionary and feudalistic. Even his appeal to the Elder Brother society no longer appears in his selected works.[8] Mao Zedong's *Six Essays on Military Affairs*[9] outlines many of the same maxims by which the Red Spears lived and died. This probably would not have surprised Mao as he himself argued that each war had its own characteristics and its rules based on time, place, and so on.[10] Comparing and contrasting these two movements is a good way to bring both of them into perspective and gain a deeper understanding China's struggles throughout the first half of this century.

One key factor in common was that both the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Spears were often confronted by much larger and seemingly more powerful opponents. The difference here is that the Red Spears raised and used much larger forces on a more consistent basis. Mao called for the concentration of forces. He instructed that

the enemy force should be lured in deep, away from its own base areas to a point where the guerrilla forces can be concentrated to annihilate the enemy.[11] The Red Spears and the Chinese Communist Party both did their best to avoid a passive defense.[12] The concentration of troops and the decisive campaign were key maxims for both groups. Both groups also relied on the speed of mobilization and taking the initiative. Mao wrote of the need for strategic retreats, where an inferior force would fall back before a superior force in order to conserve its strength.[13] This is exactly what the Red Spears would do when they refused to mobilize when there was no chance of winning. The biggest difference between the Chinese Communist Party and Red Spears is that Mao put these traditional practices down on paper and founded the Communist regime to legitimize them.

Mao argued that before engaging in combat the Chinese Communist Party must be sure to have two of the following in their favor: popular support, favourable terrain, concentrated Red troops, identified enemy weak spots, a tired and demoralized enemy, and the enemy induced to make mistakes.[14] These maxims are hardly revolutionary, especially as Mao claims not to have developed the theory until after 1927. By then the Red Spears had been applying these ideas for five years. Mao also emphasized the importance of winning the first battle. The Chinese Communist Party expected to fight battles beyond the first, while the Red Spears hoped to counter the threat in one. The concentration of troops was also seen as a key in Mao's approach to warfare, but this is

hardly revolutionary and his emphasis on it is very similar to the Red Spear's own reliance on it. Mao also argued that it was inadvisable to fight when the enemy was either close to other units or entrenched, a situation that the Red Spears avoided as well.[15]

Mao argued for decisive battles, and in many ways put into words what the Red Spears had already been doing for years. He noted that the Red Army had no way to replenish their arms and ammunition, and that there were many White armies and only one Red. He observed that the numerous White armies stayed close together, and must be defeated quickly lest they came to each other's aid.[16] These were the same problems which the Red Spears had overcome. Mao also argued that the decisive battle required seizing the opportune moment, concentration of superior numbers, outmaneuvering the enemy, favourable terrain, and striking the enemy while he was on the move.[17] Once again, these are virtually identical to the Red Spears' own approach to battle. Mao argued for battles of annihilation, where the destruction of one division was better than routing ten.[18] This is slightly different from the Red Spears. The Red Spears when possible also pursued battles of annihilation, often slaughtering their opponents on the field, or at least as they retreated. At the same time, since the Red Spears' concerns were slightly more immediate than those of the Chinese Communist Party, the Red Spears unlike the Chinese Communist Party often found negotiated settlements acceptable. Yet for both the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Spears, destroying the enemies' effective strength, not holding towns and cities, was the number one priority.[19]

Contrasting and comparing Mao's writings and the Red Spears' practices gives

evidence to the fate of the Red Spears. It was not that the Red Spears were defeated in battle, that their methodologies were flawed, or that they were wiped out by their opponents. Instead, as the Red Army grew in strength, it promised many of the same things that the Red Spears promoted. It had a larger organization, and more and more Red Spear chapters began to join its ranks. The fact that the Red Army continued to use similar methodologies to the Red Spears with great success, defeating Jiang Jieshi's Nationalist forces, helps to emphasize the effectiveness of Red Spear practices. In the end it was not military defeat but the military effectiveness that brought an end to the Red Spears. They successfully saved thousands of lives and villages from the endemic fear and violence of warlord China. It was this success that allowed the Red Spears to join the Red Army, and it was Red Army success that founded the People's Republic of China and finally brought an end to close to fifty years of political and military instability in wartime China.

Throughout the warlord period and the Second Sino-Japanese war the Red Spear Society provided a system of defense on which millions of rural Chinese depended for protection. In fact the Red Spear Society was the only truly effective method of organization the peasants developed. Through their intelligence monopoly and method of organization the Red Spear Societies were able to defeat better armed and equipped opponents while only sustaining minimal casualties. It was this ability and not magical charms which caused peasants to join the Red Spear Society. If all the Red Spear

members had going for them were magical charms they would be more religious zealots than militias, and would have had only a limited following. As it were the Red Spears were able to promise a relatively good chance of survival to its participants and potential members, and so it was not through magic, but through effective organization and an intelligence monopoly, that the Red Spear Societies defeated not only armies of bandits but also warlord and Japanese armies. The Red Spears' method of organization allowed them to swiftly outnumber their opponents. At the same time their intelligence monopoly not only located the decisive points but also allowed them to pick the most suitable terrain, thus making the disparity less than it seemed.

While the Red Spears have traditionally been the property of social historians, considering the military side of their movement answers and raises many new questions. Beyond the scope of this study is the capacity of the Red Spears for banditry and its role in their system of logistics that might help explain their bandit behaviour. It is also likely that their role in the Sino-Japanese war is much more significant than previously recognized. It also raises new questions about the quality of Chinese soldiers, and by extension the soldiers' actual role in the war with Japan. The Red Spears' techniques and method of organization are shared by earlier militant secret societies, particularly by the Boxers that created turmoil in 1899-1900. By recognizing the strength of sectarian groups it is possible to gain a more accurate idea of the actual strength of the late Qing dynasty.

These questions, however, go beyond those of the Red Spears themselves. The Red Spears were simply concerned with defending their homes from the depredations of

soldiers and bandits alike. In this regard the Red Spears, traditional militias, and many secret societies are entitled to a military study. My research has shown that the Red Spears were not ignorant hordes of spear wielding peasants who foolishly charged into a hail of bullets while believing themselves bullet proof. Instead, they were people who could weigh the risks against the rewards, and understood that joining the Red Spear Society was not a fool's game. They were men with spears who expected to beat those with guns. The Communists conquered a country with an army of peasants with guns. Using similar methods, the Red Spears managed to provide a degree of safety and security to millions of Chinese by beating the rifle with the spear.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Slawinski 1972: 201.

2. Harvel and Perry 1982: 268.

3. Lipman and Harrell 1990: 7.

4. Showalter 1996: 304.

5. Perry 1980: 156.

CHAPTER 1

1. Chesneaux 1972.

2. Ibid., 2.

3. Thaxton 1974: 279.

4. Chesneaux 1972: 6.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 11.

7. Esherick 1983: 282.

8. Some examples of such studies include an analysis of Chesneaux's work by Ralph Thaxton in "Some Critical comments on Peasant Revolts and Revolutionary Politics in China," *Journal of Asian Studies* (33, 2, 1974). A second assessment of Chesneaux can be found in James Polachek's "Secret Societies in China and the Republican Revolution," *Journal of Asian Studies* (32, 3, 1973). Frederick Wakeman Jr.'s "Rebellion and Revolution: The Study of Popular Movements in Chinese History," *Journal of Asian Studies* (36, 2, 1977), focuses on the issue of defining secret societies. Kwang-Ching Liu's "World View and Peasant Rebellion: Reflections on Post-Mao Historiography," *Journal of Asian Studies* (40, 2, 1981) focuses on the changes of the field within China

itself. Joseph W. Esherick reviewed the field in "Symposium on Peasant Rebellions. Some Introductory Comments," *Modern China* (9, 3, 1983, 275-284). The introduction to David Ownby's *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China. The Formation of a Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) is an excellent historiographical piece as well, but it also fails to address the fact that secret societies are the domain of the social historian.

9. Overmyer 1981: 154.

10. Ibid., 159.

11. Ibid., 155.

12. Ibid., 188.

13. Ownby 1996: 2.

14. Ibid., 405.

15. Ibid., 6.

16. Ibid., 11.

17. Chambers 1991: 396.

18.This is only the case in Western historiography. In Taiwan and China academics continue to produce works of military history. These range from the development of military thought to whole studies focusing on a single battle. Military history in China, as in North America, is also very popular with the general population and the market for both books and computer games is quite large.

19. Fairbank and Kierman 1974.

20. Van De Ven 1996: 744.

21. Keegan 1976.

22. Fussell 1989.

23. Stuart 1977: 1-10.

24. Van De Ven 1996: 739.

25. Ibid.

26. Ownby and Heidhues 1993: 3.

27. Ibid., 15.

28. Hobsbawm 1965, 1969.

29. Perry 1980.

30. Ibid., 3.

31 Ibid., 152.

32. Ibid., 249.

33. Blok 1972: 494-503; Singelmann 1975: 59-83.

34. Perry 1980: 153.

35. Tai 1985.

36. Ibid., vii.

37. Harrel and Perry 1982: 284.

38. Hart 1933: 38.

39. Tuchman 1970: 62.

40. Shavit 1990: 33.

41. Powe 1975: 35

CHAPTER 2

1. Nearing 1927: 93.

2. Perry 1980: 156.

3. Ibid. 197.

4. Tai 1985: 113.

5. Nearing 1927: 111.

6. There is an extensive list of the other sectarian militias contemporary with the Red Spear Society in Perry's *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China. 1845-1945*, pp 269-273. The list includes over forty different sectarian militias and the provinces in which they operated.

7. Tai 1985: 39.

8. Nearing 1927: 111.

9. Geoffry 1927: 68.

10. Tai 1985: 113.

11. Ibid., 40.

12. Cited in Wou 1978: 283-313.

13. Ibid., 236.

14. Billingsley 1988: 24.

15. Tai 1985: 17.

16. Wilbur 1966: 4.

17. Ch'i 1982: 6.

18. Schaller 1979: 2.

19. Perry 1980: 154.

20. Schaller 1979: 2.

21. Tai 1985: 10.

22. Billingsley 1988: 26.

23. Schaller 1979: 3.

24. Billingsley 1988: 26.

25. Chesneaux 1972: 202.

26. It is often argued that the former patron-client ties with their reciprocal rights and obligations, whether previously formally acknowledged or not, began to disappear. The Red Spears actually dealt with this in two ways. They provided a way for peasants to defend themselves from exploitation. Secondly, as the Red Spears leaders were often local gentry and notables, the Red Spears helped to preserve the traditional peasant and gentry obligations.

27. Myers 1980: 244.

28. Billingsley 1988: 25.

29. Tong 1991: 94.

30. MID China December 13, 1928: 1.

31. Billingsley 1988: 43.

32. Tai 1985: 19.

33. Billingsley 1988: 41.

34. Chesneaux 1972: 202.

35. Perry 1980: 155.

36. Wakeman 1995: 25.

37. In fact the provisional criminal code of the Chinese Republic, Chapter 23, clearly stated that anyone growing, manufacturing, selling, buying, importing, smuggling smoking implements, and providing space for its use was breaking the law. The punishments ranged from fines of five hundred yuan to one thousand yuan and prison time. Cited in Ruffe 1928: 104.

38. MID China January 18, 1923: throughout.

39. In fact the very spread of opium use and production can be seen as an indication of the worsening social conditions.

40. MID China April 20, 1925: 1

41. Ibid.

42. Worse yet, when a farmer's opium crop began to ripen Nationalist soldiers arrived announcing that they had come to ensure that the crop was ploughed under and the perpetrators were arrested in accordance with the law. Before anything was actually done, however, an agreement was normally reached between the farmer and the Nationalist officer. The crop was left standing on the condition that the farmer immediately pay the soldiers roughly 60% of the crop's value. As the farmer had no cash on hand an opium broker often came forward and advanced the farmer the required funds at roughly 12% interest a month on the condition that the crop was sold to him when harvested at a little less than the market value. The opium broker, for the privilege of working with the soldiers, paid a fee to the military officers. When the crop was finally cultivated and the little brown balls of opium sap were sold to the broker, minus accumulated interest, the landlord arrived to collect his rent. Often the rent was so high that it was impossible for the farmer to make the payment, and as a result the farmer went into debt. Then the landlord arranged repayment on the condition that the farmer

continued to plant opium. MID China May 19, 1919: 1-2.

43. Billingsley 1988: 16.

44. Tiedmann 1982: 407.

45. The Red Spears were also known to behave as bandits when interacting with villages that were not part of their network. This would encourage villages to join the movement to avoid being targets. There were also many bandit gangs who took on the guise of the Red Spear Society to gain some sort of legitimacy.

46. Bandits were known to take on characteristics of the sectarian militias. In 1928 the Bare Egg Society (*Guangdan hui*) was formed by a group of unemployed people and petty criminals in response to the Gaotou village Red Spears in Henan. In many ways they imitated the local Red Spear chapter, including mystic rituals and gongfu training. Their organization was also similar and they boasted close to two thousand members. While the Red Spears generally did not accept unemployed or landless peasants into their ranks, this group was nothing but. They formed exclusively to participate in banditry, and were just the sort of group that the Red Spears had initially formed to stop. Perry 1980: 173.

47. Billingsley 1988: 16.

48. Wakeman 1995: 6.

49. Perry 1985: 154.

50. Ibid.

51. Since MID observers generally differentiated whenever possible between bandits, sectarian militias, and communists (red bandits), one can feel fairly comfortable that at the very least they are not counting communist forces in these numbers. Bandits were also believed to have killed 1,122 police in Manzhouguo and wounded another 11,016. Out of 2,296 engagements with Manzhouguo police and 212 engagements with Japanese occupation forces the bandits themselves lost 11,614 dead, 2,134 wounded, and 3,326 captured. In the autumn of 1932, however, MID estimated that there were more than 142,000 actual bandits in Manzhouguo alone. MID China September 1, 1933: 1.

52. MID Weekly Summary May 5-18, 1923: 9713.

53. Tiedeman 1982: 411.

54. MID China September 1, 1933.

55. MID China April 12, 1931: 3.

56. Billingsley 1988: 117.

57. Lary 1985: 77.

58. Bai Lang or the White Wolf was a major bandit intially active in 1911. It is believed by some that it was in response to his raids that the Red Spears were first organized. He was active in Henan. The White Wolf was finally hunted down and defeated by Feng Yuxiang in 1913. Feng Yuxiang, the Christian General, as he would later be known, was in command of a battalion and under the orders of Yuan Shikai. Bonavia 1995: 98.

59. Billingsley 1988: 117.

60. This trade has re-emerged in China since the early 1980s. A con man will go to a rural, or in recent years even urban, area and announce that he is recruiting workers for a factory or restaurant. He leads several of them away on a long bus trip to a distant part of the country. Often the women are raped as well, and as a result feel ashamed and unable to attract a good husband even if they escape. Added to that is the violence which their new husband/owner is likely to do to them if they try and escape, thus few women get away. They are normally worth around 1,000 yuan, about 200 Canadian dollars. Kristof and Wudunn 1994: 212.

61. Tian 1942.

62. MID China April 12, 1931: 3.

63. Billingsley 1988: 16.

64. Billingsley 1981: 251.

65. The soldiers, because of their claim to legitimacy, robbed peasants by slightly

more subtle and thorough methods than bandits did. For example the government soldiers would often billet themselves within the peasants' homes and make the peasants see to all their needs.

66. MID China May 19, 1919: 1.

67. Tai 1985: 20.

68. In fact all currencies were unstable: copper coin, silver teals, and silver dollars of four types (Mexican, Yuan Shikai, Hong Kong, and Sun Yat-sen). A ridiculous number of paper currencies were all in circulation at the same time. Even dealing with hard coin was difficult because the values were so unstable, and unless one had up to date knowledge of the market, politics, or currency a person was likely to lose money to those who did. Lary (April) 1985: 60.

69. MID China 1931, 8174: 18.

70. ATIS 683 44: passim.

71. Fritz 1981: 79.

72. Perry 1980: 159.

73. MID China 1931, No Date, Report No.7880: 1.

74. MID China May 19, 1919.

75. MID Weekly Summaries January 29 - May 3: 7543.

76. MID China May 19, 1919: 1.

77. Strong 1935: 237.

78. Tiedeman 1982: 408.

79. Bilingsly 1981: 267.

80. Ibid., 254.

81. Perry 1983: 357.

82. MID Weekly Summaries January 29 - May 3, 1921: 7544-7545.

83. ATIS, 139 44: 6895.

84. Billingsly 1981: 266.

85. Bandits were generally not much better armed than most sectarian militias. It is possible that they had more guns, but the majority of bandit wounds came from revolvers. The range on a pistol is such that it is not much more effective on the battlefield than a melee weapon. The Shanxi swordsman owned his own Mauser pistol and ammunition, and he could be a soldier or bandit depending on circumstances.

86. Ibid., 266-67.

87. Ibid., 268.

88. Drage 1963: 122, 123.

89. Kotenev 1937: 142.

90. Tai 1985: 112.

91. Big Swords is sometimes translated as the Big Knife Society. The character *dao* is used in the Chinese indicating a knife. The knives used however were normally close to a meter in length, with no tip, and a heavy chopping blade. Zhen 1927: 1543.; Geoffry 1927.; Tai 1985: 68.

92. In 1927 in Hubei two hundred members of the Heavenly Gate society from Yongnian county attacked the county seat in Nanhe county, taking two thousand yuan from the treasury and the magistrate prisoner. The Red Spears attacked the Heavenly Gates and killed seventy of them. Tai 1985: 97.

93. Perry 1980: 157.

94. Perry 1980: 198.

95. Tai 1985: 8.

96. Tai 1985: 33.

97. Ibid., 34.

98. Ibid., 93.

99. Kotenev 1937: 74.

100. Bao 1939: 57.

101. Perry 1980: 198-199.

102. Ibid. 199.

103. Tai 1985: 37.

104. The exact start up amount is impossible to say for several reasons. First the Red Spears were a secret society and the records are not avalible. Secondly the currencies and markets were extremely unstable and subject to constant fluctuation. This means that not only is it difficult to estimate the cost of starting a society even if the exact village size were known, but also any dollar figure would have very little meaning.

105. Geoffry 1927: 68.

106. Ibid. 199.

107. Tai 1985: 46.

108. Perry 1980: 187.

109. In this way it was possible to avoid questioning the validity of the whole process, and allow other Red Spears to maintain their faith in invulnerability. On the other hand it has often, if not entirely accurately, been noted that the practice of both bandits and soldiers to open fire too soon and thus rarely hit, also helped preserve the Red Spear

belief in invulnerability even after numerous engagements.

110. Duara 1988: 129.

111. Clausewitz 1982: 187.

112. Showalter 1996: 304.

113. Kotenev 1937: 43.

114. Geoffry 1927: 68.

115. Perry 1980: 186.

116. Tai 1985: 45.

117. Perry 1980: 194.

118. Ibid., 189-190.

119. Hart 1933: 36.

120. Barker 1979.

121. Tai 1985: 47.

122. Ibid., 46.

123. Ibid., 47.

124. Fleming 1934: 163.

125. Tai 1985: 48.

126. Ibid., 51. The author has seen this trick done many times over the years at Chinese New Year gongfu demonstrations. Variations including placing a watermelon on the man's stomach and cutting it in half without cutting the man. Sometimes the man, as

in the case of watermelon version, will be lying on his back to be struck. Another popular variation done by the Red Spears and martial artists today is to place a spear point against one's stomach and the butt of it against the wall. Then he would walk in towards the wall, bending the spear until it snaps. Yi 1960: 21.

127. Tai 1985: 51.

128. MID China May 26, 1927: 1.

129. Tai 1985: 101.

130. Hornbeck 1927: 18.

131. Impey 1926: 14.

132. ATIS: passim.

133. Barker 1979: 17.

134. ATIS: passim.

135. Clausewitz 1982: 342.

136. Seldon 1966: 69.

137. Guevara 1985: 2.

138. Billingsley 1981: 243.

139. Geoffry 1927: 68.

140. Tai 1985: 99.

141. Falls 1961: 83.

142. Clasuawitz 1982: 187.

143. McCord 1988: 164.

144. Tai 1985: 92.

145. Nearing 1927: 94.

146. Myers 1980: 248.

147. Tai 1985: 94.

148. Ibid., 92.

149. Kotenev 1937: 143.

150. Tai 1985: 91.

151. Ibid., 92.

152. MID China May 26, 1927: 1.

153. No height is given for the wall, but a Chinese soldier stands atop it, and an estimation of the walls height based on the length of the soldiers' Mauser rifle puts the wall at between ten and thirteen meters.

154. Geoffry 1927: 68.

155. Cherepanov 1970: 206.

156. Barker 1979: 81.

157. The Red Spears received defeats in conventional battles. The use of armored vehicles by the Japanese drastically reduced the Red Spears' chances of victory. There are many reports of hundreds of irregulars being wiped out in single battles. The average strength of a tank regiment was eighty tanks. The Japanese light tank had a very low tread pressure and could move over soft ground and maintain good speed cross-country. In 1938 in Anhui two thousand Red Spear members were reported defeated on March 17th by the 104th infantry, 102nd Division, and the Iwanaka unit. The Iwanaka unit was an armor unit. The Japanese reported a loss of three men compared to the loss of three

hundred to the Red Spears. There was little the Red Spears could do against the tanks of an armour unit but attempt to close with them and hope to use small arms to take out the crew. Against a single tank this may have worked, but against a dozen tanks with infantry support it was impossible for the Red Spears to win unless they actually were bullet proof. The battlefield defeats against the Japanese could be so severe that the local Red Spears would cease to exist. The local population would no longer consider it a viable defence option if casualties were too high. Barker 1979: 64.; MID Japan May 13, 1938: 3.; MID Japan March 30, 1938: 7.

158. MID Japan September 20, 1938: 1.

159. MID China November 10, 1938: 1.

160. Tai 1985: 81.

CHAPTER 3.

1. Clausewitz 1982: 182.

2. Lary 1985: 61.

3. Crow 1925: 38.

4. Tyau 1922: 123.

5. MID China April 12, 1931: 3.

6. MID China October 8, 1930.

7. Drage 1963: 123.

8. Yi 1960: 20.

9. Billingsly 1981: 245.

10. Yi 1960: 20.

11. Tai 1985: 32.

12. Ibid., 91.

13. Duara 1991: 77.

14. Tai 1985: 94.

15. MID China May 26, 1927: 1.

16. MID Weekly Summaries August 9-22, 1924: 10340.

17. MID Weekly Summaries May 5-18, 1923: 9713.

18. Strong 1935: 238.

19. Tai 1985: 10, 39.

20. Yi 1960: 21.

21. Ibid., 20.

22. Falls, 1961: 87.

23. Tai 1985: 40.

24. MID Japan November 29, 1937: 9.

25. MID Japan August 27, 1938: 5.

26.The moving and supplying of troops had become quite developed in Europe by this time, with whole sections of an army's command structure dedicated to little else.

27. Impy 1926: 32.

28. Ibid., 17.

29. Nearing 1927: 95.

30. Ibid.

31. MID Japan December 14, 1938: 5-6.

32. MID China May 25, 1921: 1.

33. MID July 22, 1927: 1.

34. Ibid., 12.

35. Ibid., 11.

36. Perry 1980: 155.

37. Nearing 1927: 95.

38. Baker 1924: 73.

39. Handel 1990: 1.

40. Ibid., 2.

41. Yi 1960: 21.

42. Ibid. 22.

43. Handel 1990: 27.

44. There are many examples from around the world illustrating how a monopoly of intelligence compensated for the lack of modern weapons. There are few examples, however, from China itself in western language sources. Few battles have been studied, and even fewer of those attribute the victor's success to an intelligence monopoly. In the case of the Red Spears, this study will have to use Western examples in some cases to show how intelligence was a factor in their victories. Western examples are necessary as the English sources on battles during this time do not have the necessary detail. Considering the shape of most armies at the time it is unlikely that the records even exist as they do for many other armies. Such things as how many rounds were fired at a given

battle will likely never be known.

We know from European history that modernized professional armies could be defeated by spear carrying militiamen. In 1879 General Lord Chelmsford invaded Zululand with eight thousand five hundred British troops. Some twenty thousand Zulu outmaneuvered his army, isolated a detachment at Isandhlwana and wiped it out. At Isandlwhana half of the entire Zulu force, about ten thousand men, overran and slaughtered eighteen hundred men on relatively open ground in the face of rapid and devastating Martini-Henry rifle fire. Probably one of the most spectacular instances of this in Western military history is the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1896, where fifteen thousand Italian troops were defeated by Abyssinian tribesman.

45.Cyril 1961: 81.

46. The Red Spears achieved several victories on the scale of the Zulu's at Isandalwana and the Ethiopians at Adowa because of their intelligence monopoly.

47. Clausewitz 1982: 280.

48. Tai 1985: 40.

49. MID China June 21, 1927: 3.

50. Kotenev 1937: 144.

51. Tai 1985: 92.

52. MID China June 12- July 11, 1939: 8.

53. Tai 1985: 81.

54. Ibid., 40.

55. Kotenov 1937: 144.

56. Perry 1980:193.

57. Cherepanov 1970: 198.

58. Ibid.

59. Smythe 1938: 213.

60. MID China September 1, 1933: 2.

61. Fleming 1934: 133.

62. Perry 1980: 183.

63. Fogel 1988: 113.

64. Ibid., 178.

65. Raudzens 1990: 404.

66. Ibid.

67. MID China June 3, 1926: 1.

68. MID Weekly Summaries July 22, 1927: 7.

69. MID Weekly Summaries September 1 - December 24, 1921: 8978.

70. MID China July 28, 1930: 5.

71. Strong 1935: 273.

72. Barker 1979: 49.

73. MID Weekly Summaries September 1 - December 24, 1921: 8978.

74. Ch'i 1976: 116-117.

75. MID China April 9th, 1920: 1.

76. Barker 1979: 30.

77. Drage 1963: 125.

78. Geoffry 1927: 68.

79. MID Weekly Summaries September 1 - December 24, 1921: 8978.

80. Tai 1985: 104.

81. MID China June 3, 1926: 1.

82. Zhen 1927: 1.

83. Yi 1960: 20.

84. MID China December 31, 1933: 2.

85. The battle of Omdurman gives a good idea of the amount of ammunition that would have to be expended to win an engagement with the Red Spears. The conditions are similar to those in North China and the disparity in arms is also very similar. At Omdurman in 1898, the British Maxim and Lee Metford machine guns mowed down eleven thousand dervishes in five hours. During the very first general Mahdist assault the infantry fired some two hundred thousand rounds of small-arms ammunition alone, killing six thousand dervishes, or half the assault force. During that first attack the British fired about thirty-three rounds per Dervish killed.

By extension, one can expect that the Japanese infantry, which had a similar ratio of machine guns per man as Kitchner and probably shot about as well as Kitchner's men as they received very similar training, and were armed with a similar rifle, could at best only expect to kill three men with the rounds carried on each individual soldier. Raudzens 1990: 416.

86. Impey 1926: 19.

87. Barker 1979: 28.

88. Ibid.

89. MID Weekly Summaries January 29 - May 3, 1921: 7544.

90. The reason for this is that Western medicine had been slowly learning how to deal with bullet wounds since the seventeenth century. The amount of contamination in the wound, debreage or dead tissue around the wound, broken bones, possibly ruptured organs, and internal bleeding all compounded the problem. Amputation would create a much simpler wound, and was thus often used when dealing with severe gunshots. Even for Western medicine, dealing with bullets that either came to a rest away from bones or broke apart into pieces within the wound channel, was extremely difficult.

91. Raudzens 1990: 415.

92. Raudzens 1990: 420.

93. Drage 1963: 126.

94. Raudzens 1990: 421.

95. Ibid.

96. MID China July 28, 1930: 3.

97. The light machine gun is normally about the same caliber as the army's standard infantry round; its advantage came from its extremely high rate of fire.

98. Barker 1979: 44.

99. Impey 1926: 25.

100. Ibid.

101. Tai 1985: 91; Perry 1980: 174.

102. Hart 1933: 38.

103. MID China January 25, 1927: 1.

104. Hart 1933: 64.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., 63.

107. Tiedeman 1982: 407.

108. MID China September 4, 1938: 11.

109. Hart 1933: 37.

110. Barker 1979: 30.

111. Cherpanov 1970: 219, 224.

112. Tai 1985: 100.

113. MID Japan April 14, 1933: 11.

114. John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* deals extensively with what motivated men to stay on the battlefield and fight in the face of imminent death or wounding. He looks at Agincourt, Waterloo, and The Somme. Keegan argues that fleeing the battlefield was one of most dangerous things a soldier could do; he further states that the majority of casualties in battle often came after one side has gone into retreat. Keegan 1976.

115. Fritz 1927: 169.

116. MID Japan August 27, 1938: 6.

117. MID China June 21, 1933: 1.

118. MID China, November 10, 1938; MID Japan December 1, 1937: 2.

119. MID Japan April 30, 1938: 10.

120. MID Japan November 30, 1938: 5.

121. MID Japan March 14, 1940: 6-7.

122. Barker 1979: 14.

123. ATIS 44 6895: 5-14.

CHAPTER 4

1. At the same time many of the Red Spear chapters were joining Nationalist defence forces and regularized militias. The government even began setting up defence schools which taught a three month program to potential militia members. As long as the government was genuinely interested in ending bandity the Red Spears were generally willing to participate. This did not end the movement; after Japan's invasion the Red Spears once again went into action on their own. Perry 1980: 180.

2. Tai 1985: 105.

3. MID China March 23, 1938: 13.

4. Tai 1985: 81.

5. MID China March 23, 1938: 23.

6. Kotenov 1937: 149.

7. Seldan 1966: 69.

8. Schram 1966: 10.

9. Mao 1972.

10. Tian 1992: 233.

11. Mao 1972: 49.

12. Ibid., 51.

13. Ibid., 57.

14. Ibid., 65.

15. Ibid., 111.

16. Ibid., 119.

17. Ibid., 120.

18. Ibid., 124.

19. Tian 1992: 239.

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GLOSSARY.

Bai Lang	白狼
Baiqiang hui	白槍會
Bao Zhijing	包之靜
Dadao hui	大刀會
Dongfang Zajie	東方雜階戲
Du Xiu	獨秀
Guowen zhoubao	國聞周報
Heiqiang hui	黑槍會
Henan Hongqiang hui bei Wu Peifu jundui tusha zhi canzhuang	河南紅槍會被吳佩孚軍隊屠殺之慘狀
Henan zhi Hongqiang hui	河南之紅槍會
Hongqi hui	紅旗會
Hongqiang hui	紅槍會
Hongqiang hui yu Zhongguo de nongming baodong	紅槍會與中國的農民暴動
hongxue	紅學
Hongxue hui	紅學會
Huangqiang hui	黃槍會
Hongqiang hui de qiyuan jiqi sanhou	紅槍會的起源及其散後
huitang	會堂
huizhang	會長
Kangzhan zhong de Zhongguo nongcun dongtai	抗戰中的中國農村動態

Luqiang hui	綠槍會
Tianmen hui	天門會
Wanbei de Hongqiang hui	皖北的紅槍會
Xiang Yunlong	向雲龍
xiangtang	香堂
Xiao Xiang	瀟湘
xuezhang	學長
Yi Shi	伊士
Zai Huanbei kangdi de Hongqiang hui chuanqi	在皖北抗敵的紅槍會傳奇
Zhen Xin	枕薪
Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji Yanjiu hui	中國農村經濟研究會